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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

ADRIFT ON THE ORINOCO;
OR, THE TREASURE OF THE DESERT. *BY A SELF MADE MAN.*



Having bound the two boys to their frail float, the two guachos pushed them out into the stream with long poles. The current of the Orinoco now swept the boys away, and a yell of glee escaped the crowd.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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ADRIFT ON THE ORINOCO

OR,

The Treasure of the Desert

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO CASTAWAYS.

"We're in a pretty pickle now," said Will Merritt, whose good clothes looked damp and bedraggled owing to his recent immersion in salt water, as he gazed gloomily out upon the broad and heaving Atlantic, which splashed its waters almost at his feet.

"Couldn't be much worse off," admitted his companion, Jack Garrison, whose coarse and shabby habiliments were also wrinkled and sodden from the same cause.

"Cast on a deserted shore, the Lord knows where, with nothing to eat or drink. It's simply fierce," went on Will, shifting his seat on the rock he ornamented.

"It's a bad scrape and no mistake," said Jack, digging one heel into the wet sand, and looking at his associate in misfortune.

"We were fools to go sailing in that boat by our two selves."

"No, that wasn't the trouble."

"What was, then?"

"Taking that rascal's word that his craft was seaworthy, when it proved to be so cranky that as soon as the blow struck us we couldn't do anything with her."

"Well, you're something of a sailor; you ought not to have been fooled. Besides, you've been hanging around Georgetown for two or three weeks, and you should know the honest boatmen from the beats."

"I guess they're all tarred with the same brush. The craft looked all right to me. At any rate he's lost her, which serves him right."

"That doesn't do us any good. It looks as if we were lost as well as the boat."

"While there's life there's hope. Never give up the ship is my motto."

"That sounds well when you read it, but it's poor consolation when you're up against the real thing. Where do you suppose we are?"

"I've an idea yonder is Point Mocomoco, but I may be wrong. I only passed this way once."

"Where is Point Mocomoco?"

"At the mouth of the delta of the Orinoco."

"Why, that's a long way from Georgetown."

"Yes, about 200 miles."

"How could we come so far in twenty-four hours?"

"We were carried by the gale. It was a snorter while it lasted. It's a wonder to me that the boat ran it out."

"We had to bale her more than half the time."

"If I hadn't kept her squarely before the wind I guess we'd have gone down to Davy Jones' locker."

Will shifted his seat again, for the rock was not an easy seat.

"I wish we knew which direction to take to strike a town or village," he said, looking up and down the inhospitable line of shore.

"It's a toss-up whether there's one within a hundred miles of us."

"If that's so what the dickens shall we do?"

"Starve, most likely."

Will looked hard at his companion.

"You take it mighty coolly," he growled.

"I don't see any use squealing," replied Jack, who had had his shares of downs in the world, and had grown philosophic in consequence. "If we've got to turn up our toes, why, we've got to, that's all."

"But I don't want to turn up my toes," protested Will. "I've got everything in the world to live for—home, parents, and a future——"

"Your future is a problem as things stand. As for me, I haven't any to lose. Neither have I any home, or parents, or friends. I had all these once, but—well, what's the use of talking? I'm just a rolling stone that's always rolling into hard luck. I was stranded in Georgetown when I met you—an American, like myself. I told you how the brig I shipped aboard went away and left me there. I believe the skipper did it on purpose. You are a young gentleman, by parentage and education, while I'm next door to a tramp, but still somehow we cottoned to each other. If I've steered you into a fix I'm sorry for it, but I'll stick by you to the last. I guess we'll get out of this somehow. I've been in some tough holes, but I always managed to crawl out of them. I feel it in my bones that we'll get out of this, and that you'll see your folks again."

"I hope so," replied Will. "I'm not used to roughing it like you, so this thing hits me pretty hard."

As they were in a tropical clime the ducking they had received when their craft went down close inshore did not greatly inconvenience them.

In fact, by this time their clothes were fairly dry, that is, their outer ones.

As the sun was out again, though low down, after the gale, Jack decided that the best thing they could do was to disrobe and dry their underclothes.

He proceeded to do this, and Will followed suit.

An hour later, during which time they had thoroughly canvassed the situation, their things were as dry as a bone, and they dressed themselves.

"I suppose your watch has stopped?" said Jack.

"Yes," answered Will, after looking at it. "It is not likely to go again until a jeweler has overhauled it."

"Got any coin about you?" asked Jack.

"Why do you ask?" said Will, in some surprise as he felt in his pockets.

"I haven't a red, and I thought if you had a piece of money of any kind—a cent would do as well as any—we'd toss up to see which way we'd head. There doesn't seem to be any choice, as I don't see that it makes any difference at all which way we go, but still I believe in luck. By tossing up we leave our route to fate, and fortune might favor us in that case," said Jack.

"I agree with you. I've got half a dozen English sovereigns, and some silver, as well as a \$10 bill," replied Will.

"Toss up the shilling. If the queen's head comes up we will go toward yonder point; if the other side shows uppermost we'll start down the coast."

"All right," said Will, and he tossed the coin.

When it struck the sand the boys looked at it.

The queen's head met their eyes.

"The point it is," said Jack, starting in that direction. "Come on."

They walked maybe two miles, passing little hillocks of sand, and bits of recent wreckage here and there.

"Looks as if some vessel had been wrecked hereabouts," said Will.

"Nothing surprising in that. The gale we almost weathered was a stiff one," replied Jack.

"Look at that broken spar yonder wabbling about in the water near the beach. Must have been a vessel of some size."

"She was a square-rigger, for that's a yard."

"There's a boat half smashed on the beach. Maybe it has the name of the lost vessel on its stern."

"We'll see when we get to it."

"I wish something worth eating or drinking had come ashore. My stomach is awfully empty. I'd give that \$10 bill for a square meal."

"I'd give more than that if I had it," said Jack. "Money is of no value on this shore, while a meal of any kind would go a long way toward keeping us alive. Our very lives might depend on a single meal."

When they reached the smashed long boat they found no name on its stern.

Will was about to continue on when Jack stopped him.

"Wait till I overhaul her," he said. "There's a sort of locker in her bows. There might be something in it of value to us."

"What do you expect to find?"

"Quite often a skipper keeps his boats provisioned in case of an emergency. We had four boats aboard our brig, and every one carried a breaker of water and a bag of ship's biscuits, besides other things, in her locker."

"Then let's look into that locker," replied Will, in some excitement.

Jack proceeded to do so.

He found a small flat cask full of something which he guessed was water, and a package tightly wrapped up in oilskin and tied with spun yarn.

Getting out his jack-knife he dug out the stopper of the cask, and found it was water.

"You can take first drink while I'm unwrapping this bundle, which is almost sure to contain something we can eat."

Will drank greedily of the water, for he was almost parched.

When he put the cask down Jack had the bundle open.

It contained a package of crackers and several crocks of potted meat bearing English labels.

Will seized one, and got the cover off while Jack was taking a drink.

The way the contents of that crock vanished down Merritt's throat showed how desperately hungry he was.

"Help yourself to a cracker," said Jack, falling to himself.

The two boys made a hearty meal off the two jars of potted tongue, and a portion of the crackers, washed down with the water.

There were six jars of meat left, and quite a bunch of crackers.

Jack made the stuff into a bundle, and slung it over his shoulder.

"You carry the water cask, Will, and when it tires you we'll exchange," he said.

Will took it under his arm, but found it rather awkward to handle.

Then they trudged ahead again, feeling much refreshed and greatly encouraged after their meal.

In fact, they felt like different boys.

In this way, and alternating their burdens, they covered another mile, and then the position of the sun showed them that daylight was fast waning, and that darkness would ere long be upon them with the customary suddenness of the tropics.

"Let's sit down and rest," said Will. "I'm tired."

He threw the cask down on the sand, and Jack followed suit with the package.

They were close to a sweep in the shore, and the view ahead was cut off by a dense mass of shrubbery.

"No sign of any town or village yet. We'll have to sleep out here in the bushes. It will be my first experience of the kind," said Will.

"It won't hurt you. I'll guarantee that you won't catch cold," replied Jack.

"Catch cold in this latitude? I should imagine not. More likely we'll be moonstruck if there is a moon."

"As there was a moon two nights ago in Georgetown, I guess we'll have it here, for the sky is almost clear; only it will rise later."

The ocean breeze fanned the heated faces of the boys.

"Hist!" ejaculated Jack suddenly, laying his hand on his companion's arm.

"What's the matter?" asked Will, in surprise.

"I hear voices on the other side of that shrubbery."

"So do I. I wonder who the persons are."

"Wait here and I'll find out. I understand Spanish, you know. It is well to be cautious before showing ourselves."

Thus speaking, Jack crept forward and peered through the bushes.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO SAILORS.

On the sands, a few yards away, Jack saw two rough-looking men, who were clearly sailors, going through a sandalwood chest that they had evidently dragged out of the sea.

"Lucky the sea washed our mate's chest ashore, or with a little brownin' by the sun, and a feather or two stuck in our hair, we might have been taken for native Injuns," one of them was saying in English.

"Yes, we're in much better trim outside, but our insides ain't so well furnished. I feel as hollow as a reed," replied the other.

"Hello! More luck! Here's a big flask of whisky. Just what we need to brace us up," said the first speaker, quickly unscrewing the metal top and putting the flask to his lips, while his companion sat back on his haunches and looked at him enviously.

"When you're through, Sam Griffen, I'll take a nip," he said, holding out his hand impatiently.

Sam looked at him while he clung to the flask as if he never meant to relinquish it.

"I say, are you goin' to drink it all?" cried the other, angrily.

"First come first served, Bill," said Griffen, pausing for breath. "My throat is as dry as a chip."

"So's mine—as dry as this here sand 'round us. Just cut it short, will you?"

"There you are. Drink hearty," said Sam, passing the flask over.

Resuming his search of the chest while Bill Flipper was "wetting his whistle," he presently brought forth a bag of fancy biscuits.

"More luck still. Bill. Here's some biscuits," he said.

"Do you call them things biscuits?" asked Flipper, eyeing the fancy articles askance.

"That's what they are. Kind of fancy and sweetish, but they taste good," said Griffen, munching one with much avidity.

"Hand over a bunch of 'em," said Flipper.

There was silence between them for a few minutes, while their jaws worked upon the crackers.

"Pass the flask," said Griffen, holding out his hand for it.

Flipper grinned and put it to his lips.

"Avast there—that flask is my property," growled Griffen. "I found it in the chest, so hand it over."

"Fair play, Sam. We're the only two escaped from the wreck of the Molly Owen, and it would be precious hard if we don't stand by each other."

"That's right, so don't take more'n your allowance. We will share and share alike."

Flipper turned over the bottle, and Griffen took another long swig.

"That calks up the leaks in a feller's innards," he said, screwing on the top and putting the flask in his pocket. "How do you feel now, with a cargo of rum and biscuit aboard?"

"First rate. Well, here we are the only survivors of the bark. She's gone to the bottom, an devery soul aboard of her except you and me, Sam."

"Includin' the owner and his darter, who were returnin' from Rio to their home in New York. She was a blamed pretty gal, don't you think, Bill? I wouldn't mind bein' tied up to such a tidy craft—as trim as one of them steam yachts that the plutocrats sail about in these days."

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Flipper derisively. "Jest as if a gal like her would look at a shellback like you."

"Me a shellback! Why, I'm only forty, and when I'm spruced up I'm as good-lookin' as any man of my age. You always were jealous of my figgerhead, Bill Flipper."

"You've had two wives already. How many more d'ye want?"

"That's my business. However, what's the use of talkin'? The gal is gone, and food for the fishes by this time."

"You'd never got her, anyway. She was only seventeen, young enough to be your own darter. You used to act like a fool aboard on her account. If her old man or the skipper suspected what you were thinkin' about when you plastered your hair up with palm ile, and shaved yourself so often, you'd have got a takin' down, you can take that from me."

"Look here, Bill Flipper, you and me are friends, but

there's such a thing as rubbin' it in too far, d'ye understand? I've got my knife, and if I ran it into your gizzard you'd have somethin' to squeal about," said Griffen in an ugly tone.

"I've got a knife, too, if it comes to that," returned Flipper, with a bad look in his eye. "Don't you go to threatenin' me, 'cause I might make a hole in you big enough to shove that chest in."

The two men eyed each other in a way that made Jack Garrison, in the background, think they might come to blows, but they didn't.

"What's the use of our quarrelin'?" growled Griffen at length.

"Ain't no use. You started the matter with your threat to open my gizzard. The bark's gone, the crew, 'cept me and you, are gone, the gal is gone, and so's the officers and her father. What's the use thinkin' any more about 'em? All we've got to do is to take care of ourselves, and who knows, now we're well victualed, we may be able to tramp it till we come to some village or town where we can get afloat ag'in?"

"Right you are, Bill Flipper. There's my hand. Let bygones be bygones. If we only had a revolver we might be able to clean out a house or two on our road if it was worth robbin', and that would put us in funds."

"Maybe there's a gun in the chest. Have you been all through it?"

Griffen made no reply, but dived again into the sea-chest.

Presently he pulled out a brace of shooters and a belt full of cartridges.

"We're lucky, again," he said, handing one of the revolvers to his companion, who saw that it was fully charged, and then buckling the belt around his waist.

The sailors got up and looked around.

"Nothin' in sight," said Flipper. "Come on."

They walked off westward along the shore, and as Jack and Will, for the latter had grown impatient and joined his companion, sat up and looked at each other, night descended on the face of Nature like the gradual turning down of a bright gas-jet.

"Well, what do you think of those two chaps?" asked Jack.

"I think their room is better than their company," said Will.

"That's my opinion. They're bad eggs. I'm glad we didn't run foul of them."

"I should say so. We'll camp here for the night. That will give them a good start of us."

Although it was now night the sky was so resplendent with stars, and the air as clear as a bell, that they could easily see around them for a considerable distance.

The wind had fined down to a light breeze, but the waves still rolled in with some force, making quite a surf.

The boys talked about their chances of reaching a civilized place on the morrow until the fatigue they had lately been through overcame them, and they fell asleep in the shadow of the bushes.

The sun was well up when they awoke in the morning.

The sea was nearly calm now, and there was hardly any wind.

"Well, old man, how do you feel?" asked Jack.

"As good as I can expect to feel under the circumstances," replied Will, not very enthusiastically.

"Let's eat and then get a move on."

The boys opened up their supplies and proceeded to make a breakfast.

"Mighty lucky we are to have anything to eat this morning," said Jack.

"Yes, it was fortunate we ran across that boat," replied Will. "If we hadn't I don't know what would have become of us."

"If we had gone in the opposite direction we'd have missed it. You see that there's luck after all in leaving things to chance."

Fifteen minutes later they were on their way again.

Walking in the heat of a tropical sun was very fatiguing to them, for they were not used to such a thing, and so they gladly welcomed the sight of what seemed to be a wood in the distance.

It took an hour's tramp to reach it, and by that time they were completely done up.

Throwing themselves on the ground, they rested for nearly an hour, and then resumed their journey under the leafy covert, keeping within a short distance of the sea so that they would not go astray, since Jack believed that there was more chance of their meeting a village near the water than away from it.

When noon came they were still in the long wood.

They stopped and made a light meal, took a rest, and then went on again.

Late in the afternoon they reached the edge of a clearing opening on the sea.

Here they saw a rude shanty that looked as if it was deserted.

"We'd better stop here for the night. What do you say?" said Will.

Before Jack could reply a pistol shot rang out, coming from the house.

It was followed by a shrill scream, apparently from a girl.

"Help! Help!" cried the voice, in English.

"There's a woman in trouble, Will," cried Jack, excitedly. "Come on; let's see what the matter is."

Spurred on by the girl's piteous cries, Jack dashed for the door of the house, followed at a slower pace by Will.

CHAPTER III.

ROGER GALE AND HIS DAUGHTER.

When Jack reached the door and looked in he saw a young and pretty girl struggling in the arms of one of the two ruffianly sailors he and Will had seen the evening before on the seashore, while the other stood in a drunken attitude looking on, apparently maintaining his equilibrium with great difficulty.

On the floor lay an elderly man, bleeding from a wound on the side of the head, either dead or unconscious.

The fellow who had hold of the girl was almost as tipsy as his companion.

Jack recognized him as the person answering to the name of Sam Griffen.

Apparently he had done the shooting, and the revolver lay in the middle of the floor.

The girl was doing her best to fight the ruffian off, but was like an infant in his muscular grasp.

"There ain't no use of you tryin' to stop me, miss. I took a fancy to you from the moment you stepped aboard the bark at Rio, and now that I've got the chance I'm goin' to kiss you. I've been hankerin' for a smack of your red lips, and you might just as well oblige me first as last, seein' as I'll get it in the end whether you like it or not," said Griffen, his words interrupted here and there with the hiccups he could not suppress.

Without calculating the chances he might be up against, Jack rushed forward, struck Griffen in the mouth, and tore the girl from his grasp.

The rascal staggered back, not so much from the blow as from his general unsteadiness, and then stood glaring at the boy in angry surprise.

"Who are you, and where did you come from?" he demanded, with an imprecation.

"You and your friend had better get out of here, for I guess you're not wanted," replied Jack, coolly, as the girl he had rescued from the ruffian's clutches sank weeping beside the form she called father.

"Why, you young whippersnapper, do you dare order me about?" roared Griffen. "I'll fix you in about two minutes."

He rushed at Jack, but the boy dodged him easily.

Seeing the man's revolver on the floor he snatched it up, cocked it, and stood ready to defend himself against both men.

"Drop that gun!" shouted Griffen.

"I'll drop you if you don't get out of here," replied the plucky boy.

Seeing that the sailor was about to dash at him again, he raised the weapon and pointed it at him.

Griffen started back, for he read determination in the boy's face and attitude.

After uttering a string of imprecations he cried to his companion:

"Shoot him, Bill. Blow his head off."

Flipper reached for his gun, and after some trouble got it out.

At that moment Will came to the door and looked in.

Flipper tried to aim at Jack, but made a bungle of it.

The boy took deliberate aim at his wavering hand and fired.

Flipper with a roar of pain and rage dropped the weapon as if it had suddenly become red-hot.

"Pick up that gun, Will," said Jack.

Will rushed in and snatched it from the floor, then walked over beside his friend.

"Now," said Jack, "I'll give you chaps just half a minute to get out. If you don't obey you'll be carried out."

Flipper glared furiously at Jack, for two of his fingers had been put out of business by the boy's shot.

Griffen realized that everything was against him and his companion.

The presence of the two boys was a surprise to him, and his drunken mind told him that they could hardly be alone

in that part of the country, and every moment he expected to see some men walk into the shanty.

"All right, my fine chap," he gritted. "I'll know you when I see you ag'in, and then I'll get square with you for this piece of business."

Taking Flipper by the arm, they staggered out of the house, and the boys watched them go down to the water's edge, where the wounded ruffian bathed his lacerated fingers in the sea.

The fellow would have fallen into the water only Griffen held on to him.

Leaving Will to watch them, Jack went over to where the distracted girl was bending over her father.

"Is he badly hurt, miss?" he asked in a sympathetic tone.

"Oh, I fear he is dead. My poor father!" she moaned in grief-stricken tones.

Jack felt of the man's heart, and he found that it was beating quite strongly.

"He isn't dead," he said. "Let me look at his wound."

He rubbed the blood away with the discolored handkerchief the girl had been using for that purpose, and it needed no doctor to see that the wound was by no means a desperate one.

"He's not seriously hurt, miss," said Jack. "The bullet just cut the skin along the side of his head."

"Are you sure?" she asked eagerly. "He looks so white and still."

"He'll come around all right. Will," he said to his friend, "go down to the shore and bring some water up in that vessel," pointing at a sort of gourd which lay on the floor.

Will picked up the gourd and went on his errand.

"So this is your father, miss?" said Jack.

"Yes."

"How came you both here? Are you the young lady whose father owns the bark Molly Owen, that foundered in the late gale?"

"Yes. How did you know?" she asked, looking at him in surprise.

"I heard those two rascals talking about you and the loss of the vessel last evening some miles down the shore. From their conversation I judged that everybody aboard was lost but themselves."

"My father and I were saved by a spar, and came ashore here during the night."

"You were fortunate, both of you. My friend and I were wrecked on this coast, too, by the same gale which caught us way down off Georgetown, and blew us up here. We were out sailing in a small boat, and the wonder is we ever lived through the storm, for the boat was not a good one by any means."

"What is your name? I wish to thank you for coming to my assistance."

"My name is Jack Garrison. My friend's name is Will Merritt. May I ask yours?"

"Jessie Gale. My father's name is Roger Gale. I am very grateful to you for saving me from that man. He was intoxicated, but still he knew what he was doing. He and his companion were common sailors aboard my father's bark. Their names are Griffen and Flipper."

"I am glad I was able to be of service to you, Miss Gale, and anything further that I and my friend can do for you and your father you can depend we will do."

"Thank you. I appreciate your kindness," and she flashed a grateful look at him.

At that point Will returned with the gourd full of water.

"Where are those two rascals now, Will?" asked Jack, as he proceeded to wash Roger Gale's wound and bathe his face and head.

"They're walking up the shore," replied Will.

"Now that we are armed they'd better keep out of our way," said Jack.

In a few minutes the girl's father recovered his senses, and Jack helped him to sit up, propping his back against his knee.

"Dear, dear father, how do you feel?" asked Jessie, solicitously.

"Not very good, my darling. Am I badly hurt?"

"No, sir," put in Jack. "You'll feel all right in a little while. Let me bandage your head up."

"Where are those rascals?" asked Mr. Gale.

"They've gone away. This boy made them go."

The gentleman was puzzled to understand how Jack and his friend happened to be on the scene, but he did not feel in shape to ask questions just then.

He closed his eyes and rested his head on his daughter's lap.

Jack thought it better that he have quiet, so he called Will, and they went outside.

"That's the girl we heard those sailors talking about last evening. She and her father escaped the wreck of the bark by floating ashore on a spar. Those rascals evidently dropped in at this hut and found them here. The ruffians were half seas over from the contents of that whisky flask, which I dare say they have emptied between them. Griffen is clearly sweet on the young lady, who is far above his class, and seeing her here with only her father to protect her he thought he could take liberties with impunity. Her father in defending her from him aroused the fellow's anger, and Griffen shot him. Fortunately he made a bad shot, though he came pretty near putting a bullet in the gentleman's brain."

"You think he'll recover?"

"Sure, unless he should get a fever or something of that kind on account of his wound, which is really not dangerous as it stands."

"I suppose we'll have to wait here till he is well enough to go on with us?"

"We were going to stay anyway all night. He may be in shape in the morning to make a start."

"The small amount of provisions and water we have won't go far among four."

"That can't be helped. They have their share, and then we must all trust to luck. We'll come out somehow. We have been quite lucky so far, and I hope good fortune will continue to favor us."

The boys returned to the house in half an hour, just as the sun was sinking, and found the girl in the same position, with her father's head on her lap.

He was asleep, and breathing easily.

"Have you had anything to eat since you came ashore?" asked Jack in a low tone of Jessie.

"Yes; we found some rice cakes and a little water in that gourd," she replied. "It was enough for two slight meals."

"We have a little potted tongue, some crackers and water. We will divide with you and your father."

"Thank you. It is very kind of you to offer to provide for us out of your little store. If you will give me a drink and a cracker now it is all I shall want for the present."

Jack brought the water-keg, and held it while she drank from the bung-hole, as that was the only way.

When she had satisfied her thirst he handed her half a dozen of the crackers.

The boys then ate sparingly themselves.

Later on, when Mr. Gale awoke much better and refreshed by his sleep, Jack helped him to the water and a share of the provender.

Jack then satisfied his curiosity concerning the presence of himself and his friend in that out-of-the-way spot, and he in turn told the boys something about the voyage of the ill-fated Molly Owen, after she had sailed north from Rio de Janeiro till she was overtaken and wrecked by the gale.

Then they all talked about their prospects of reaching civilization before lack of food knocked them out.

All Mr. Gale knew about their position was that they were on the south shore of the delta of the Orinoco, probably at least 100 miles from the mouth of the river.

"Do you know of any towns along this shore?" asked Jack.

"I know there is a place called Placoa, about twenty-five miles this side of the river, and I know there is a town by the name of Barrancas on the northern side of the river near its mouth, but that is the extent of my knowledge of this part of Venezuela. There are probably many native villages scattered about in this neighborhood, but we are likely to hit one more by accident than anything else. We must try to reach Placoa, for we can't miss it by going straight on, provided we are able to get that far. I should imagine that it would take us several days traveling on foot to reach it."

"We can't get there then unless we find something more to eat. What we have will not last over to-morrow," said Jack.

As matters stood the prospect before them was indeed gloomy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VILLAGE INN.

Next morning Mr. Gale was feeling all right again, he said, except a natural soreness about his wound which Jack treated again with an application of sea water.

The gourd was cleaned out, and the balance of their water emptied into it.

Their breakfast consisted of two crackers and some tongue between as a sandwich, and a drink or two of water.

After they had finished, leaving them for the time being more hungry than before, they started on their tramp for the town of Placoa.

Following a beaten track they gradually lost sight of

the ocean in the wood, but supposed they were walking parallel with it.

They rested at frequent intervals, as the heat oppressed them very much indeed.

The exertion and the warmth was felt particularly by the girl and her father.

The latter's wound was feverish, and he felt the pain and general effects of it the further they went.

At last he had to lie down, declaring that he didn't know whether he could go any further.

Jessie looked anxious and worried.

Jack, who had taken a fancy to her, which she seemed to return, spoke encouragingly to her, and said things would turn out all right in the end.

After an hour's rest Mr. Gale made an effort to go on.

They walked very slowly, making very little progress, on his account.

Noon came, and they rested to eat and drink, but Jessie's father could only take a little water.

While they were lounging about Jack spied something hanging in the bushes.

Investigating the object, he found it was the cartridge belt Griffen had worn.

The loss of the revolver had caused him to throw the belt away when it felt uncomfortable.

Jack was glad to get it, for it furnished him and Will with a surplus of ammunition for their revolvers.

He replaced the two discharged cartridges with fresh ones, and divided the rest with Will.

He kept the belt, thinking it might prove of some use.

During the afternoon they reached a small stream of water, took copious drinks of it, refilled their gourd with fresh, for the supply they had was warm and not very refreshing, and washed their hands and faces.

Jack bathed Mr. Gale's inflamed wound repeatedly, and rebanded it.

"I feel almost like a new man after that," said Jessie's father. "My blood was so feverish that I felt ill all over. You are very good to me, my lad, and I won't forget your kindness."

"Don't mention it, sir. It's our duty to do all we can for each other. We're comrades in hard luck, you know."

As he looked at the girl he saw her eyes resting on him with a look of gratitude and friendliness that rather thrilled him.

The party continued their way, much refreshed, and Mr. Gale was little troubled with his wound during the next few miles, when they came in sight of cultivated fields and other evidences of civilization.

Finally they struck a thatched house of one story about sundown.

A man, a woman, and several nearly naked children came to the doorway to look at them.

Their appearance was evidently a great surprise to the people.

Jack tackled the man in Spanish, and managed to make their plight understood.

He learned that they had been walking from the delta, and were now about six or seven miles from it.

He offered to pay for food and such accommodation as

the natives could furnish, and the man and his wife agreed to entertain the party for the night.

While the woman was preparing a meal the man brought out a lotion which he told Jack would heal Mr. Gale's wound, and so the boy applied it, and bound the gentleman's head up with fresh rags.

The party were so hungry that the plain fare set before them tasted sumptuously.

They were encouraged, too, by the news that they would strike a large village ten miles or so further on, at which they might secure a conveyance to take them to Placoa.

Jack, on inquiry, learned that the two sailors had passed there early in the afternoon, and had secured a meal and directions.

It was, therefore, presumed that they had gone on to the village.

The hut consisted of two rooms—the living one, which was large, and a sleeping apartment, which was small.

When the woman had cleaned up the man brought a quantity of dry straw into the big room, spread it along one of the walls, and told Jack that they must put up with that for their bed.

As the party couldn't do any better they lay down on it just as they were, and slept through the night without being disturbed in any way.

After breakfast next morning they were provided with some food and an earthen bottle of milk to take with them.

Jack offered the man four shillings, which Will supplied, and he seemed perfectly satisfied with the remuneration.

As a matter of fact, he was well paid.

The party then started in the direction in which the village lay, along a well-defined trail made by wagon wheels and animals.

They reached the village about two o'clock, and Jack learned that there was an inn at the further end of it.

Their presence in the place attracted much attention and curiosity as they passed along, and they were followed by an increasing mob of children until they reached the inn, which was a two-story stone structure, very old in appearance, and very dirty and unkempt.

The landlord was lounging in the doorway, smoking a long cheroot, and he eyed the party with no great favor.

Jack asked for accommodation and information.

"How far is it to Placoa?" he asked the boniface.

"Over one hundred miles," was the reply.

"As far as that, eh? Can we get a wagon to take us there?"

The man shook his head.

"We will pay good."

"You have money?" said the landlord, beginning to show interest at last.

"We have some," replied Jack.

"How much?" asked the landlord.

"Enough to pay you for entertainment till to-morrow morning and the services of a wagon and driver, if we can get one, to take us to Placoa."

The landlord seemed to reflect while he scanned the four critically.

Finally he bluntly stated his charge for the accommodation asked for, and his price was double his customary rates.

Jack said they would pay it.

The man, however, wanted to see some evidence of their funds before he would accept their custom.

"Show him a sovereign, Will," said Jack.

Will pulled out the six and displayed them before the landlord's eyes.

The man's eyes sparkled covetously, and he became all smiles and politeness at once.

With a low bow he waved them in.

The room they were introduced to was the main one of the inn, but it was not particularly inviting, particularly to a young lady like Jessie Gale.

Jack inquired as to the accommodations they could have for the night.

The landlord said he could let them have three separate rooms, and the boy said they would like to see them.

The man led the way upstairs to the next story, and showed them the rooms.

There was a single bed in each, and not much of a bed at that.

The rest of the furniture consisted of a stool and a washstand.

Leaving Mr. Gale and his daughter in one of them for the present, the boys returned downstairs with the landlord.

Jack ordered the best meal the boniface could get up, and then he and Will went outside and sat on a bench.

Their surroundings on one side was a wood, on the other the straggling houses of the village.

A donkey, loaded with panniers, and driven by a man on foot, was passing along the road that led into the wood.

The flock of children which had accompanied the party to the inn had departed, and the boys were mighty glad of it.

On the whole the village did not seem to be a lively one, their advent seemingly being the most important thing that had happened for some time.

"It's a good thing you can speak Spanish, Jack," said Will. "We never could have made our wants known to the boss of this alleged hotel."

"Yes, for Spanish is spoken, more or less, all through South America."

"Where did you pick it up?"

"Down in Rio, where I stopped about six months, owing to a game leg."

"There is one thing that talks better than any language," grinned Will.

"What is that?"

"Money. Did you notice how that fellow took his hat off to us as soon as I showed him the six sovereigns?"

"You ought not to have displayed all your money. I told you to show him one. Now he'll soak us good for everything we have."

"He named his price before he saw my money."

"That doesn't make any difference. He'll charge for extras that we won't get or are not worth what he asks for them."

"We won't pay him."

"It probably would not be to our interest to scrap with him."

"I don't believe in being robbed."

"Your objection won't cut much ice."

"But we'll need all our funds when we reach Placoa."

"That's nothing to the landlord. He'll roast us as well as he can."

At that moment two men came around the corner of the building.

One glance satisfied the boys as to their identity.

They were the sailors, Griffen and Flipper.

CHAPTER V.

THREATENED TROUBLE.

The two sailors saw the boys at the same moment, and they stopped and regarded them with black looks.

Jack returned their stare with one of indifference.

The sailors consulted and then retired the way they came.

"We'll have to look out for them; they will probably try to do us mischief," said Will.

"If they bother us they're likely to encounter a bullet each," replied Jack.

"Unless they take us off our guard."

"They might pounce on us when we're asleep."

"One of us will have to keep watch while the other sleeps, turn and turn about."

"You must tell Mr. Gale and his daughter that they are here."

"Of course."

"We could put the landlord on to them, too."

"I wouldn't trust the landlord any further than I can see him."

"It's his duty to protect his guests."

"That's all very nice, but I daresay if he thought he could make anything by standing in with those chaps he'd do it."

"Do you think the landlord is as bad as that?"

"I think he's not to be trusted. I'm sorry he saw all those sovereigns. I have a general idea what these natives are. Everything is fish that comes into their nets."

Will was much disturbed by Jack's summing up of their situation.

He wasn't experienced in the ways of the world, consequently it was a shock to him to learn unpleasant facts.

Jack, on the contrary, had rubbed elbows with the world as it is, and he was a sharp observer of everything that came his way.

If he distrusted a man he kept his weather eye lifting for possible trouble.

He was never asleep, so it was hard to catch him napping.

In due time they were called to supper, and found a good meal on the table.

Jessie and her father came down, and the first thing Jack did was to tell them of the presence of Griffen and Flipper.

The girl looked a bit uneasy, for since her encounter with Griffen she feared the man.

Jack assured her that he and Will would protect her.

"We each have a revolver, you know, with a supply of cartridges," he said, "so it won't be safe for anybody to try any monkey shines with you."

They enjoyed the meal very much, and at the end of it the landlord appeared with a jug of liquor and three cheroots similar to what he smoked himself.

He laid the jug before Mr. Gale, and handed the smokes around.

The boys tossed theirs to Mr. Gale.

"The liquor and the cheroots will be charged extra," said Jack to Will.

"Why so? We didn't order them."

"That doesn't matter. That's the way this fellow does business."

"You seem to have him down pretty fine."

"Every foreign landlord tries to make all he can out of his customers—especially when he knows they are Americans."

"I don't see why Americans should be a special mark for graft."

"Well, they are."

"My six sovereigns won't last long at that rate."

"You won't carry any of them out of Venezuela."

Mr. Gale said that he and his daughter would retire to their rooms at once, as they needed rest badly.

It was after dark, so the landlord provided each of them with a candle, and they said good-night to the boys, who were not ready to go to bed yet.

There was a large kitchen at the back of the house, and Jack and Will took a peep into it as they strolled about outside.

They saw Griffen and Flipper seated at a table with a couple of rascally-looking natives, who looked very much like the gauchos of the Argentine Republic.

The four were eating and drinking, and seemed to be on excellent terms.

Making a sign to Will to keep back, Jack slipped over to the next window.

All windows were open in that climate, and as Jack was now within earshot of the table, he easily heard what the four men were saying.

Their talk was carried on in Spanish, but Jack understood that language almost as well as he did English.

"The old man is well off, though he doesn't look it now," Griffen was saying. "He's got a house and a bank account in New York, and he'll collect the insurance on his lost bark. You help us carry the girl off and I'll guarantee he'll come down with our price to get her back."

"It will be no trouble to carry her away, senor," said one of the dark-skinned natives, named Domingo. "If you are sure Silva and I will make a good round sum out of the job you can consider the matter settled."

"Sure! Why, man alive, her father dotes on her. He will pay any price to have her restored to him," replied Griffen.

"But if he has not the money nearer than New York we will have to wait some time before he can pay down the price. The girl must be watched and taken care of in the meantime," said Domingo.

"Of course; but you say you have a capital hiding place up the Orinoco."

"Si, senor. One week's journey by horseback, from here."

"Then what difference will it make whether you have to

keep her a week or a month? Me and Flipper will watch her while you and Silva do the negotiating for her return."

Domingo and Silva consulted in a low tone, too low for Jack to hear what passed between them.

"We agree, Senor Griffen," said Domingo.

"Good! You will provide horses for us all?"

"Si. Leave everything to us."

"Now, how about them kids?" chipped in Flipper.

"One of them did this to me," and he held up his bandaged hand. "I would like to pay him back."

"You would have your revenge, eh?" grinned Domingo.

"Yes," replied Flipper, fiercely. "I want to get square with him."

"Which one is he?"

"The stouter of the two. You have seen them both, so you know the one I mean."

"Si. He is a boy you must handle with care."

"Handle with care!" roared Flipper, contemptuously.

"I could throttle him with one hand."

"Maybe, if you catch him off his guard; otherwise he is not of the kind that is easy to manage. I read his face, senor. I see there fight."

"Bah! He is only a kid."

Domingo shrugged his shoulders.

"Suppose I fight a boy like him I make sure I get in the first blow," he said, rolling a cigarette and lighting it. "He has the grit that tells. He is of your country, but you do not seem to know him. I see him once only; that is enough for me to tell what he shall be capable of when it comes to the what you call pinch."

"Which of the rooms will he and his pal sleep in?" asked Flipper.

"That I do not know. When they all are asleep it is easy to find out. There is no lock or bolt on the doors. Sanchez he sometimes wish to pay a visit to his roomers in the night when they are asleep, which he could no do if they locked themselves in."

"Then we can count on Sanchez to keep his hands off in this matter of the girl?" said Griffen.

"Si, senor. I will tell him what shall happen in the night, and he will keep out of the way."

"What time shall we pull the job off?"

"We will say midnight. It is a good time. By day-break we will be many miles on our way."

"All right. The matter is settled, then?"

Domingo nodded and rose from the table with his companion.

"I go now to make the preparations. We will meet at the corner of the house in three hours."

The two gauchos strolled out by the back door, leaving the sailors together.

Jack, satisfied he had heard enough, rejoined Will.

As they walked back to the door of the inn Jack detailed the rascally project that was on the tapis for the night.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Will. "How are we going to prevent this? There are four of them, you say."

"We must watch for them, and give them such a hot reception that they'll think they were hit by an earthquake," replied Jack.

"I think you ought to inform the landlord and demand his protection."

"The landlord is as big a rascal as the others. We've got to rely on our own efforts for protection."

"Those native chaps will be armed, I suppose?" said Will.

"They are likely to have knives, but we can easily hold them off with our revolvers."

"Can we hold off four men? That is heavy odds for us, don't you think?"

"We'll do the best we can. Let's go up and see how we can stand them off."

They entered the inn and walked up the stairs to the second floor.

Investigation showed them that there was a second stairway at the rear of the corridor on which the rooms opened.

"They'll come up the back way, most likely," said Jack.

"And the stairs are so dark we'll never be able to see them as they creep up."

"Unfortunately that's right. Then two of them could come up the front stairs at the same time the others were ascending these back ones, and we'd be caught between two fires."

"What are we going to do in order to save Miss Gale from being carried off?"

"There's only one way that I can see that offers any chance."

"What is that?"

"We must awaken her father, tell him about the situation, and have him arouse his daughter. Then we'll all take refuge in one room and try and fight the four rascals off. There's bound to be shooting, and that ought to attract attention, though it's my opinion nobody around here will come to our assistance."

"This is a pretty state of things," growled Will. "A fine country where a party of unfortunate travelers can't put up at a country hotel without being set upon by rascals and done up."

"Foreigners like us have to take chances in the wilds of these South American republics."

"I wish to gracious I was back in Georgetown, where British law prevails."

"Wishing won't get you there. We are up against a hard proposition, and must take the bull by the horns."

"Well, are you going to arouse Mr. Gale?"

"Not yet. Those chaps are not coming up here till midnight—at least that was the time I heard them set. We'll let Mr. Gale and his daughter sleep as long as possible. They need rest, while we can stand a little hardship."

"I haven't seen any other lodgers up here," said Will. "Let's look at the other rooms, and see if we can find a better one for making a defense than the three the landlord assigned to us. The ones we have taken are too small for four to huddle in and do much."

Jack thought his companion's suggestion a good one, and they proceeded to investigate the other rooms.

At the end of the passage, near the back stairs, they found a fair-sized room, but it showed evidences of occupancy.

"This room would be just the place to make a stand in," said Will.

"Yes. It is occupied by somebody, however."

"What if it is? We can take possession on the ground that we are menaced by an attack, and therefore have the right to adopt the best means at hand to save ourselves."

"The occupant will probably be on hand before the hour of the attack, and he will doubtless object to letting us in."

"Let's stay here now, and hold the fort against all comers."

"We'll sit out in the corridor so as to keep an eye on things."

"How are we going to keep track of time?"

"Guess at it. I judge that it isn't more than nine now."

The boys found a couple of stools in the room, and took possession of them.

Time passed slowly with them.

The house was quiet except at the kitchen end, whence they could hear loud talking and laughter.

Jack finally got tired of inaction, and crept down the rear stairs and listened to what was going on in the kitchen.

It appeared to be occupied by a number of persons, who were evidently drinking as well as talking, as the boy judged by the clinking of the glasses.

The two women he had seen in there, servants of the house, appeared to have retired and left the room to the men who had come to enjoy themselves.

The landlord was there, for Jack recognized his voice.

There was a door at the end of the passage.

Jack opened it and looked out.

The night was bright, and he could see all around the immediate vicinity.

He didn't see anybody moving.

Stepping outside Jack walked around to the front of the house.

The two sailors were sitting near the front door, talking and smoking.

The idea occurred to the boy that the easiest way out of their difficulty would be for them to leave the inn on the sly while the coast was clear.

Accordingly he returned to Will, who had been impatiently waiting for him in the dark, and told him what he proposed doing.

"That's a good idea," replied Will. "Let's do it."

Jack at once went to the room occupied by Mr. Gale, aroused him, and in as few words as possible told him what they were up against.

He was astonished and much disturbed.

He agreed with the boy's proposition to leave the place on the quiet.

Dressing himself, he went to the next room and awakened his daughter.

After explaining matters he told her to dress herself as quickly as she could, and join them all in the corridor.

In ten minutes she came out of the room.

"Now follow me," said Jack, and he led the way toward the rear stairway.

As they were about to descend a door opened below, and a man with a candle appeared at the foot of the stairs.

It was the landlord, and he was evidently coming up.

CHAPTER VI.

A STROKE OF LUCK.

Owing to the darkness above the landlord did not see the party in the act of descending, and they made no noise to attract his attention.

Jack was in the lead, and saw the man first.

He stepped back and whispered that they must take refuge in the nearest room until the landlord had got out of the way.

The boy guessed that the boniface occupied the large room that showed signs of being used right along.

Opening the first door at hand, Jack pushed the others inside and then followed himself, closing it to a crack.

The landlord reached the landing and entered his room, but did not close his door, somewhat to Jack's uneasiness, since they dared not make a move as long as the man was in a position to observe them.

The boss of the roost moved around his room for a few minutes, then came out into the corridor and listened.

All was still.

After standing for a short time, as if deliberating over something, he started along the corridor toward the rooms allotted to his four guests.

Jack opened the door and looked after him.

It was so dark that he couldn't see his figure.

Nevertheless he suspected the man's object.

He believed that his purpose was to go to the room in which he expected to find Will and him asleep by this time, and go through his companion's clothes in order to possess himself of the six sovereigns he had seen, and any other money the boy had.

Jack's conjecture was correct, for that was the man's object.

His cupidity had been excited by the gold, and he had an idea Will had not shown him all he possessed.

The fellow was so silent and cautious in his movements that Jack could not tell when he entered one of the rooms.

He knew that it would only be a question of a few moments when the landlord would discover that they had left their rooms, and that would arouse his suspicions as well as his anger.

They had little time to lose before there would be a ruction in the place that would arouse attention and lead to trouble.

Relying on the darkness to obscure their retreat, Jack called on the others to follow him.

"Make as little noise as you can, for the landlord is down the corridor," he said.

They followed him to the head of the back stairs, and then down to the ground floor.

Jack opened the back door and looked out.

Everything was silent, and there was no one in sight.

"Come on," he said, stepping outside, and they followed him.

There was an outhouse close by, and Jack's object was to put that between them and the inn to begin with.

It would serve to hide their further retreat to the woods behind.

They reached the building without discovery, and then hurried off toward a field that lay between the inn and the woods.

They had barely reached and entered it when they became aware of a commotion in the rear.

"The landlord has found out that we have dusted out, and he is raising Cain and organizing immediate pursuit," said Jack. "Unless we are seen crossing this field he'll naturally conclude we have gone down the road, that is, unless Griffen and his companion can swear that we have not. That all depends on how long those two rascals have been sitting in the front of the house, which commands a view of the road."

The party got an extra hustle on, and ran toward the wood as fast as they could go.

They reached it quite out of breath, and stopped while Jack reconnoitered.

They could see the inn in the moonlight, and made out nearly a dozen persons moving about there.

"We'll go on," said Jack. "The sooner we place some distance between us and the inn the better our chances for escape will be."

They were about to start ahead when the rapid gallop of horses came to their ears.

Two or more mounted persons were approaching them through the wood.

That made their position awkward.

"We must hide till the riders go by," said Jack.

That was an easy matter, and soon they were concealed in a bunch of bushes.

Hardly had they disappeared when two horsemen came dashing up, each leading a second animal.

To the consternation of the fugitives the men reined in in front of their place of concealment, and dismounted.

Peering at them through the foliage, Jack recognized them as the two gauchos.

They tied all four horses to one of the trees near by, and then rolled and lighted a cigarette each.

"We have yet lots of time," said one of them in Spanish.

"Why wait till midnight to carry off the girl? Sanchez is with us. The sooner we get started the further along our road we'll be by morning," said the fellow whose name was Silva.

"Very good," replied Domingo. "Follow me."

The two rascals started for the inn.

As soon as they passed out of the wood the fugitives came from their place of concealment.

"Here's luck," said Jack.

"What do you mean?" asked Will.

"Those horses. See them? There are four of them, and four of us. On their backs we'll soon get out of this neighborhood, and can defy pursuit."

"That will be great," cried Will, in a tone of animation.

"We'll lead them a short distance before we mount, so that those rascals won't hear the sound of their hoofs," said Jack.

He stepped forward and rapidly detached each of the animals in turn.

"Take this one, Will," he said. "Mr. Gale, grab the bridle of this one. I'll take the other two myself."

After leading the horses a hundred yards into the woods Jack helped Jessie on one of the two he led himself, and mounted the other.

Will and Mr. Gale were quickly in the saddles of theirs.

"Now off we go," said Jack. "Miss Gale and I will lead the way."

"Are you going straight ahead?" asked Will.

"For the present, yes."

"Where will that take us to?"

"I couldn't tell you. My object just now is to secure our escape. That is the first consideration. We may go out of our way, but that can't be helped."

Off they started, Jack and Jessie riding side by side, and carrying on a conversation together.

The girl proved to be a splendid rider, much to Jack's satisfaction.

As for Jack himself, he could ride anything in the shape of a horse.

Will was not an expert, but he could ride good enough to suit all purposes, while Mr. Gale was accustomed to horseback exercise.

At the end of half an hour they emerged from the wood into a broad path.

This they followed without figuring where it would take them to.

They rode for many miles in the moonlight without meeting with a soul.

They passed many cottages on the edge of cultivated grounds.

Their inmates had been asleep hours before.

At length they slowed down to a walk, feeling fairly safe from being overhauled by their enemies, who could scarcely have found out their line of retreat.

"Say, Jack, I guess we've gone ten miles by this time," said Will from behind.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we have," returned Jack.

"Suppose we're riding away from Placoa instead of toward it."

"We'll find out when we meet one of the inhabitants."

"That swindling old landlord must be in a blue funk over our beating him out of what was coming to him," laughed Will.

"He isn't half as mad as the sailors and the two natives who conspired to abduct Miss Gale," returned Jack.

"Those sailors are fierce rascals. They ought to try to help Miss Gale and her father, seeing as they were aboard the same vessel, instead of working the other way."

"If we catch them in Placoa we may be able to fix them."

"That will depend on what kind of place the town is."

"Well, let's get on a little faster."

They touched up their horses, and for the next hour made better time.

The moon had set by this time, and there were indications that day would soon break.

Three quarters of an hour later the sun rose, and they saw a couple of field laborers approaching along the road.

Jack stopped them and asked them the direction in which Placoa lay.

The man waved his hand to the right and forward.

"How far off is it?"

The man couldn't say, but intimated that it was at a considerable distance.

"Is there a town or village near here?" continued the boy.

"Six miles ahead there is a village," was the reply.

"This road leads to it, does it?"

The man nodded.

"Muchas gracias," said Jack. "Give him a small piece of silver, Will."

Will handed the man a sixpence.

He looked at it, and then, taking off his hat, made the party a low, sweeping bow, grinning all over his face.

"How much did you give him, Will?" asked Jack.

His friend told him.

"I'll bet that's more than the fellow will earn by working all day."

They met people frequently after that, who regarded them curiously.

Foreign-looking strangers were apparently not often seen in that neighborhood.

At length they saw the village in the distance, and hastened toward it.

Jack reined in at one of the first houses, and inquired if there was an inn in the place.

There was none, but he was told he would find one on the main road a few miles further on.

So they passed through the village, and aimed for the inn in question.

They reached it about eight o'clock, and found it to be a fair-looking place.

Jack told the landlord that they wanted a good breakfast, and their horses looked after.

The party was invited to make themselves at home.

The landlord was curious to learn whence they had come, but Jack parried the question.

He learned that Placoa was eighty miles to the northwest.

"We have quite a ride before us," said Jessie.

"Yes, but it isn't half as bad as walking," said Jack.

After a good wash and a chance to fix themselves up, the four fugitives sat down to a bountiful breakfast, which they enjoyed hugely.

Their horses were then brought around in front of the inn.

The landlord charged a fair price, and after paying him the party set out on their way toward Placoa.

All were feeling good now, and anticipated no further trouble from their enemies, whom they thought they had outgeneraled.

But that was where they made a mistake.

CHAPTER VII.

TRACKED DOWN.

They traveled all day at a rapid rate, for they were anxious to reach their destination as soon as possible.

They had secured a substantial lunch at the inn to carry with them, and this they ate about one o'clock in a shady nook along the road.

All probably would have gone well with them but for a luckless turn of fate.

They came to a junction of two roads about five o'clock, and stopped, puzzled to know which was the proper one for them to take.

While they were deliberating a sinister-looking fellow came riding up with a bag across his saddle behind.

Jack hailed him, and asked which of the two roads ought they to follow to go to Placoa.

He eyed them sharply before replying, and then said the left.

"You can't expect to travel all night," he said, "so I will recommend you to stop at the inn I came from. You will get good beds and good fare there. I always patronize the place myself, for you might travel a long way and fare worse."

The man rode on and soon disappeared around a turn in the highway.

"I don't like the cut of that fellow's jib," said Jack.

"Nor I," agreed Will. "I wonder if he directed us right?"

"We'll have to chance it. At any rate, he said we would come across an inn where we would get good beds and entertainment. That is what we are on the lookout for. We all need a good sleep to-night, even if we had to take it in the woods."

So they followed the road the man had indicated, and thereby laid the foundation of all their subsequent troubles.

But as good often comes out of evil it was fortunate for the two boys in the end, that the finger of fate beckoned the party out of the right road.

Night overtook them before anything in the shape of a house showed up.

They remarked that they no longer met with the cultivated fields they had passed so often before, and that the way was more lonesome and wild than they had hitherto encountered.

"I'm thinking that fellow lied to us," said Will. "I do not believe we shall find any inn to stop at."

"I see a light ahead," said Jack. "It's close to the road. Perhaps it is the inn we are looking for."

They soon reached the building, and it looked like a house of entertainment.

The building was of two stories, long and weather-beaten, and before it stood a cart, the horses of which they could hear neighing in the stable at the rear.

The front door was shut, and there was no sign of business about the place.

Jack alighted, and told the others not to dismount until he had investigated.

He walked up to a window, the shutters of which stood open.

By standing on tiptoe he could overlook the whole room. The only person inside was a hard-looking woman, who was seated before a table mending a man's garment.

There was another and larger table in the center of the room, with a dozen chairs pulled up to it.

In a corner was a kind of dresser filled with cheap crockery.

Along one of the walls was a line of pegs for hanging hats and clothes.

There were many other things which it is not necessary to particularize.

Before Jack had completed his survey a dog barked in the yard at a furious rate, and the party heard his chain rattle as if he was tugging at it.

The woman put down her work and came toward the door.

Jack hastily left the window and went to meet her.

"What do you want?" she asked in a surly tone in Spanish.

"Is this an inn?" asked the boy.

"Yes, but we don't take in everybody."

"There are four of us—a gentleman, his daughter, another boy and myself. We want supper, beds, and breakfast."

The woman peered at the rest of the party.

"Come in," she said. "I will send a man to take charge of your horses."

Jack helped Jessie to dismount, and she and her father entered the house, while Jack and Will held the animals till a rough-looking fellow came out of the yard and took charge of them.

The boys then went into the house.

The four sat on a settee on one side of the room, feeling very much like cats in a strange garret.

Presently an overgrown, clownish-looking youth appeared and began setting one end of the big table for four. It didn't take him long, and then he disappeared.

In the course of half an hour a rude repast was ready for the party, and the woman told them to sit up and eat.

She resumed her occupation, but Jack noticed that she was furtively watching them.

When the meal was finished Jack said they would like to go to bed, as they were tired.

The woman summoned the clownish boy and ordered him to show the party to the rooms she mentioned on the floor above.

The boy took three candles and led the way.

As they were ascending the stairs they heard a clatter of hoofs outside, and that indicated several new arrivals.

Jessie was shown into a small corner room, her father to one adjoining it, while the boys were taken to a room further on.

The boy left a candle in each room, and then returned downstairs.

"I'm fagged out," said Will. "I shall sleep like a top to-night."

Jack walked to the window that opened on the road and looked out.

The moon was just rising above the tree-tops and shone full on the house.

The boy heard an excited conversation in Spanish going on below.

He looked down and then he got a shock.

He saw the two sailors, Griffen and Flipper, and their rascally native companions, Domingo and Silva, with two other fellows of their own breed, standing at the door talking to the woman and rough-looking man.

From what Jack heard, the newcomers had learned of their arrival and were in high glee over the discovery.

That they meant to profit by it there could be no doubt.

"Will," whispered Jack.

"What do you want?" asked his friend with a yawn, and half undressed.

"We're trapped."

"Trapped! What do you mean?" cried Will, startled into wakefulness.

"Six men have just reached this inn."

"What of it?"

"Two of them are the sailors."

"What!" gasped Will. "Not Griffen and Flipper?"

"That's who they are. The other four are South Americans, two of whom are Domingo and Silva, the rascals we done out of the horses."

"Great Scott! don't say that!"

"They have just learned from the landlady of this inn that we are here."

"Oh, Jupiter!"

"And they are going to make sure of us this time."

"Good gracious!"

"Put on your clothes again and get ready for a scrap."

"I say, this is tough."

"It certainly is. I'm going to warn Mr. Gale."

Jack slipped out of the room, and made his way along the corridor to the room occupied by Jessie's father.

The door was not locked so he walked in.

"Who's there?" asked the gentleman, who was already in bed.

"Me—Jack."

"Oh! Well, you have something to tell me?"

"I have bad news."

"Bad news!" cried the gentleman, sitting up.

"Yes. We have been tracked to this place by our enemies, whom we thought we had eluded."

"You don't mean it."

"I do. I have seen them. The sailors, the rascals they conspired with to help them abduct your daughter, and two others in league with them."

"What shall we do?"

"Get up and dress yourself, and arouse the young lady. We'll have to fight the thing out this time."

Mr. Gale hurried into his clothes, and then rushed into the room occupied by his daughter.

Jack returned to Will, and found his friend dressed again.

Seizing the candle, Jack examined the corridor, and found that there was only one flight of stairs leading to it.

"They'll have to come up that way, and we must head them off," he said to Will.

"Head off six men."

"Yes. Miss Gale must be protected at any cost."

"I see our finish."

"Perhaps, but there will be others in the same boat. I intend that those rascals shall pay dearly for their triumph if they win it."

He took out his revolver and looked at it.

Mr. Gale now joined them.

He held in his hand a kind of club he had found in the corner of the room.

"We must make the best stand we can against those rascals," he said. "They shall reach my daughter only over my dead body."

"And ours," replied Jack, with a resolute look.

A few minutes afterwards Jessie appeared with a frightened face.

"Let us go to the head of the stairs," said Mr. Gale. "Two or three of these villains shall die before we are overpowered."

"Oh, father!" cried the girl, throwing her arms around his neck.

"There, there, my dear, don't be frightened; we will protect you."

"But if you should be killed, father?" she sobbed.

"Don't think of such a thing, daughter, before it has happened. Go into one of the rooms further back, and keep out of harm's way."

"Yes, go into the one we occupied at the end of this passage. The door is open, and you will find a candle in it," said Jack.

Jessie was loath to leave her father, but when he insisted that she should retire from the danger point she reluctantly yielded.

Mr. Gale and the two boys placed themselves at the head of the stairs and awaited the outcome of the situation with dogged determination.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTURED.

Nothing happened for half an hour, but the time seemed much longer to the three.

At length they heard the opening of a door below, and the sound of several feet.

Then came the glint of a candle borne along the passage.

The stairs were short and straight, and Mr. Gale and the boys presently saw six persons, among whom they recognized the two sailors, appear at the foot of the flight.

Domingo was in the lead, Silva behind him, the other two sinister-looking South Americans next, while Griffen and Flipper brought up in the rear.

They lost no time in coming up, and they trod as lightly as they could.

Bending over the balustrade the party above watched them ascend.

When the rascals reached the middle of the stairs Jack suddenly shouted in Spanish:

"Halt!"

If a thunderbolt had struck the house at that moment the scoundrels could not have been taken more by surprise.

Domingo stopped, and the rest had to.

The gaucho raised the candle and all looked up.

They saw Jack and Will standing on the landing pointing their revolvers down into their faces, and the figure of the bark owner, looming indistinctly behind the boys.

Domingo uttered a native imprecation, and the sailors said something under their breaths.

Then Domingo said:

"What is this? What do you mean, senors? We are going to bed."

"That's a lie," replied Jack. "You are coming up here to attack us and try to abduct the young lady who is under our protection."

"We attack you, senors!" cried Domingo in a tone of

assumed surprise. "You must be mad. You are strangers to us. Why should we do you harm?"

"You can't deceive me, for I am acquainted with your plans. You and those two sailors conspired together at the inn kept by one Sanchez to kidnap Miss Gale. We left the place in the night to save her. Now that you've followed us here, your object is the same, and we are prepared to resist you as long as we have a bullet in our revolvers. Advance another step and I'll shoot you dead."

"I swear you are wrong."

"You'd swear anything, I have no doubt, but we know better than to trust you. Retire or take the consequences, and remember we shall be on the watch all night."

Domingo, clearly much discomfited, turned to his companions and said something in a low tone.

Then he surveyed the landing again, and the formidable front presented by the party above deterred him and his associates from making any rash move.

Griffen and Flipper liked the prospect even less than the natives, and began a backward movement.

"Senors, I swear we mean you no harm," said Domingo again. "Let us go to our rooms in peace. We will in no way disturb you."

"No; you can't come up here except at the risk of your lives," returned Jack.

"The landlady shall hear of this."

Thus speaking, he turned around, and the others, taking that as their cue, began to descend the stairs.

The rascals paused at the foot for a private consultation.

Finally, leaving two of the party at the bottom of the flight with the candle, the others returned to the main room of the house.

"What do you suppose will be their next move?" said Will.

"How can I tell? Without firearms they will hardly dare to charge up these stairs, and there is no other way of reaching us that I know of," replied Jack.

"They may ascend by way of the windows with the aid of a ladder."

"That's so; I forgot that. Give Mr. Gale your revolver and go and watch out of one of the windows. If you see them bringing a ladder warn us at once. Two of us will be enough to guard the stairs in any case, while one at whichever window they might plant a ladder could hold them at bay with a revolver. Go."

Will hurried off to keep watch from one of the windows.

It was well that he had thought of the rascals adopting such a plan, for that is just what they attempted in a little while, thinking to catch the party on the second floor off their guard.

Will had hardly been five minutes at the window before he saw the sailors, assisted by Domingo and Silva, bringing a ladder up to the house.

He ran back to the landing and told in a whisper what was going on.

"Stay here with Mr. Gale," said Jack.

He went to the window from which Will had been watching, and found that their enemies had already planted the ladder under it, and were deciding who should mount first.

Silva was sent into the house to direct the two men at

the foot of the stairs to make a bluff at ascending them in order to hold the attention of the persons the others expected to take by surprise.

They started up at once with Silva, as if they meant business.

On the outside Domingo went up the ladder first.

Jack waited for him with drawn revolver.

As his head appeared above the level of the window the boy shoved his weapon in his face.

"Git or I'll fire!" he cried.

Domingo was so startled, as well as taken by surprise, that he lost his balance and fell backward.

He struck Griffen, who was following him, on the head, and broke his hold.

The two swept Flipper off the ladder in their fall, and when Jack looked out he saw the three floundering on the ground, swearing furiously.

Griffen was the first to recover his feet, and seeing Jack looking down he shook his fist at him and flung a string of imprecations into the air.

At that moment there was the report of a revolver on the landing.

Mr. Gale had fired at one of the men on the stairs, and slightly wounded him.

The three rascals retired precipitately.

Jack leaned out of the window, seized the top of the ladder, and flung it to the ground.

Thus the second effort of the enemy failed.

For half an hour the party was not disturbed, but they did not believe that this inaction on the part of their foes would last long.

They kept a sharp lookout from one of the windows and down the dark stairway.

At the end of that time Silva and the two sailors reappeared at the foot of the stairs.

This time they had no light.

Griffen shouted up.

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Gale.

Hardly had he spoken when there was a flash and a report, and a charge of buckshot rattled against the wall near Mr. Gale's head, who fortunately had been standing alongside the balustrade, instead of on the landing, where the ruffians supposed he was.

The moment the gun was discharged the three men made a rush upstairs, thinking to reach the top in the confusion.

There was no confusion among the defenders, neither the bark owner nor Will having been touched by the shower of shot.

Will, who had the revolver, fired it down in the dark, aiming at nothing, for he could not distinguish the attacking party.

The bullet hit Silva, and he fell back on the stairs with a loud cry.

The two sailors kept on, and Griffen was met by a clout on the head by Mr. Gale's club, and was staggered by the blow.

Jack, hearing the rumpus, and seeing nothing doing outside, hastened to back up his friends.

Will's revolver rang out again, and the bullet barely missed Flipper's head.

The next minute he was in the grasp of that scoundrel, and a desperate tussle took place between them, with the chances all against the boy, who was no match for the brawny sailor.

Griffen recovered himself, and with the blood running down his face from the wound inflicted by the bark owner, tackled that gentleman savagely.

The appearance of Jack, however, was likely to turn the scale of battle against the two sailors.

The chief trouble was it was too dark to distinguish friend from foe.

He got hold of Flipper, however, and struck him a staggering blow in the face with the butt of his revolver.

At that exciting moment a shrill scream from Jessie rang out from the room at the end of the passage.

It showed that something unexpected had happened to her.

Jack was the only one in a position to rush to her aid. He did so at once.

Reaching the door of the room, he saw the girl struggling in the grasp of Domingo and the other two natives.

They were forcing her toward an open door in the wall which neither Jack nor Will had noticed when they were in the room.

The reason why they had not was because it was a secret one, without anything to show that it existed there.

"Drop that girl!" cried Jack, leveling his revolver.

He was afraid to fire lest he hit Jessie, and before he could find a fair show the girl was pulled through the opening.

He rushed up to the door, intending to save Jessie at every hazard.

As he reached it he suddenly received a blow in the face from Domingo, who expected this move on his part, and was lying in wait for him.

As he staggered back the gaucho sprang upon him, bore him to the ground, and pulled the revolver from his grasp.

Calling back one of his friends, they secured the boy between them, binding his arms to his side.

Then they tossed him on the bed, and grabbing up the light rushed out in the corridor, where the scrap was still going on between Mr. Gale, Will and the sailors.

The arrival of Domingo and his companion on the scene resulted in the complete defeat of the boy and the bark owner, and they were soon bound like Jack.

Both Griffen and Flipper looked badly handled, Jack's blow having torn a great gash in the latter's cheek, and they wanted to take revenge on the two boys; but Domingo prevailed on them to postpone the matter for the present, telling them that the girl was now in their power, and it was advisable to lose no time in carrying her and their other prisoners away from the inn.

Jessie was secured downstairs, and gagged to keep her quiet.

The rascals then repaired damages as well as they could, and after a drink all around, their own horses, and those used by the fugitives, were brought around to the front of the house, the prisoners were bound on the animals they had ridden, and then the party set off at a rapid pace up the road.

CHAPTER IX.

ADRIFT ON THE ORINOCO.

The prisoners were separated from each other during the ride.

Jack's horse was led by Flipper, who followed after Domingo, the leader, leading the animal bestrode by Jessie. Behind Jack came Mr. Gale, convoyed by one of the natives, and behind him Will, in charge of Griffen.

Last of all rode the wounded Silva, his arm done up in a sling, and with him was the other native.

The party reeled off many miles at a brisk pace before daylight disclosed a bare and lonesome landscape ahead.

There was no path or road over this sterile stretch of land, which seemed to be of considerable extent, with few if any trees to break the monotony.

As the sun rose in the sky the prisoners began to experience the heat more and more, and the sailors were somewhat affected, too.

The South Americans alone did not appear to be incommoded.

At length the landscape began to change for the better, and after about an eight-hour steady ride since leaving the inn a halt was called under a large spreading tree, the thick leaves of which afforded a welcome relief from the burning rays of the sun.

The prisoners were lifted to the ground and propped against the trunk.

Then rice cakes, with a slice of meat, were passed around, which with water formed the meal.

The right arm of each of the prisoners was released so they could feed themselves.

After the lapse of an hour the party started on again.

Their way was mostly shaded by trees, which offered some relief, as the sun was hotter than during the morning.

Will had felt so fagged out that he slept during more than half of the first stage of the journey, while Jack nodded more or less during the trip.

From the time of leaving the tree both boys dozed most of the time until the sun set and darkness came on.

By this time the party had covered about seventy miles, and were fifteen miles or so south of Placoa.

The second stop was made for rest and another frugal meal.

The third stop was not made till midnight, after they had ridden thirty miles more, and again food was distributed.

It was at this point that Jack heard Griffen suggest that they camp there for the night.

Both sailors were tired of the long ride, and they wanted a chance to stretch themselves and take a sleep.

Domingo said that no stop for sleep would be made till some time next morning, when the party connected with the inn kept by a man friendly to the robber band.

"We will stay there all day," he said to the sailor, "and go on again after dark."

The night seemed an endless and fatiguing one to the prisoners, who felt very glum over the uncertain prospects ahead for them.

Morning came at last, and about seven o'clock the inn was reached.

The prisoners were taken from the horses and marched into the house.

Jessie was turned over to one of the two women at the place, and was conducted away from her friends.

It made Jack wild to see the poor girl's distress, and to realize that it was quite impossible for him or her father to help her in any way.

Mr. Gale and the two boys were placed in a small room at the end of the house.

Only one of their arms was bound, but one of the natives squatted outside on guard.

This was the first opportunity they had had since their capture to talk together, and they naturally availed themselves of it.

"Say, this is rough," said Will, dejectedly. "I never thought I'd ever have to go through anything like this."

"If you think it's hard what must it seem to Miss Gale?" replied Jack.

"My poor child!" said the bark owner. "No one but herself knows how she suffers!"

"I wonder what these chaps are going to do with all of us?" said Will. "They will release you, Mr. Gale, of course, otherwise they could not expect to get the ransom they are looking for you to put up for the release of your daughter."

"I will willingly give every dollar I'm worth for the safe return of my child to a civilized town whence I can take her home," said Mr. Gale.

"If I were you I wouldn't let on that I had much, then maybe these fellows will be satisfied with a small sum. Anyway, an American dollar is worth twice its value in South America, and I should think that \$1,000 would look like a fortune to these scallawags."

"You forget, Will, that Griffen and Flipper regard money in the same way we do, and \$1,000 wouldn't count for much with them. Unfortunately, they appear to know that Mr. Gale is well off, for I heard Griffen tell that native chap who is running things that he owned a house and had a bank account in New York. He also spoke about the insurance money due for the loss of the bark. Altogether it is almost certain that they mean to demand a stiff ransom for Miss Gale," said Jack.

"They don't expect to get a ransom for us, so what disturbs me is what are their intentions regarding us? Do they propose to do for us when they get us to their destination, or what?" said Will.

"It would be useless to figure on what their purpose is regarding us," answered Jack. "They have us in their power, and they will treat us as they please."

"I wish we could escape," said Will.

"So do I, but there's precious little chance of such luck coming to us the way matters look."

At that point Domingo appeared, and addressing Jack said that breakfast was ready, and they must walk out to it.

They had no objection to doing that, for the three were very hungry.

They were taken into the main room of the house, their other arm released, and then each was tied to his chair.

After the meal they were escorted back to the room, and both of their arms tied.

Two mattresses were brought in, and then they were told that they had better go to sleep, as they would have no opportunity to get any during the night.

The three took this as an indication that the journey further inland would be resumed at dark.

As they were tired and used up after their late experience they took advantage of the chance to rest, and slept nearly all day.

Just before sundown they were treated to another fair meal.

Jack and Will were led back to the room, but not Mr. Gale.

He was informed by Griffen that he was to be separated from the party and would be sent to the town of Barrancas, at the mouth of the Orinoco, where he would be able to secure a passage to Georgetown.

From Georgetown he could get to the United States, where he could set to work to get together the amount of the ransom, which had been fixed at \$10,000.

As soon as it was dark he was allowed to bid his daughter a temporary farewell, after which he set off in charge of Silva for the Orinoco.

The two boys did not learn that the bark owner had parted company with them until they were brought outside to resume the journey westward, then they saw that he and Silva were not with the party any longer.

Jack called Domingo over and asked him about the absence of Mr. Gale.

"It is not the young senor's business what has become of the other prisoner," he replied, shortly.

"Perhaps you'll tell us where you are taking us to?" asked Jack.

"You will learn in good time," was all the satisfaction he got.

The journey was then continued as before, and only one short stop was made during the night.

In the morning the boys saw a broad stream of water in the distance.

Jack asked Flipper what river it was.

"It's the Orinoco, my hearty," he answered, "and if Sam and me has our way you and your pal will be pitched into it with a stone around your feet."

He eyed Jack with a look of malice, and the boy did not feel like asking him any more questions.

They lost sight of the river soon after.

After several days of steady traveling the party entered the mountains through a defile, and finally came to a halt before another inn which stood beside the road that crossed the range.

It was only a small building, but there were outhouses and a stable attached to it.

All around the immediate neighborhood were pockets of arable land under cultivation, and half a dozen men were at work in these little fields.

The boys noted the fact that Domingo seemed well acquainted with the people at this house, and when dinner was ready, and all hands, including the field laborers, sat down to it, he appeared to be on terms of intimacy with everybody.

Jessie was not present at this meal.

In fact, the two boys had not seen her since their arrival at the mountain inn when she was led away by a woman whom Domingo called to take charge of her.

After dinner Jack and Will were taken outside and tied to a tree, one on one side and the other on the opposite side of the trunk.

In this position they could not see each other, but they could talk by turning their heads.

"I wonder what is next on the programme?" remarked Will, who had grown resigned to their hard circumstances.

"If I was a mind reader I might be able to tell you, but as I'm not I know no more about their intentions than you do," answered Jack.

"The crowd are around the door holding a pow-wow over something," said Will, who faced in that direction.

"Maybe they are deciding on our fate."

"I don't see why they took the trouble to bring us all the way here if their object was to do us up. A clip on the head after they captured us at the inn would have put us to sleep for good, and a hole dug by a spade would have completed the work for good."

"That was the plan the sailors wanted to adopt with me, at any rate, but it was turned down by Domingo. I would like to know what they have done with Miss Gale. I dare say they'll treat her all right, as they expect to make money out of her; but it will be some time before her father can get the ransom to the rascals. He will probably have to return to New York to raise it, and then he'll have to come back to this country with it. Altogether the girl will be a prisoner for some time. I wish we could escape and rescue her."

"There is no chance of our doing either."

At that juncture a loud shout rose from the crowd.

"What are the rascals doing now?" asked Jack.

"They are coming this way, and that's a sign they are going to attend to us."

In a few minutes the tree where the boys were tied was surrounded by more than a dozen bronzed and villainous-looking rascals.

They were smoking cigarettes and cheroots, and they amused themselves passing jeering remarks about the two young prisoners.

Their talk was like Greek to Will, but Jack understood all they said.

This went on for about ten minutes, when Domingo came to the front of the inn and gave a shrill whistle.

The crowd at once broke up and the men took their way toward the long stable.

Presently a man came around the corner of the inn leading a kind of burro.

Behind him followed the two sailors, carrying a small barrel between them.

It seemed to be empty from the ease with which they handled it.

Domingo took the animal's leading rope from the man, and started for the tree.

He and the sailors stopped close to the tree, and the latter dropped the barrel.

The boys viewed the proceedings with some apprehension, wondering what was on the tapis.

Griffen and Flipper released Jack first, and throwing him on the ground, bound him hand and foot.

Will was then served the same way.

Domingo led the burro up and the sailors bound the boys on each side of the animal, as they might a sack of merchandise.

The light cask was then placed on the burro's back, between the prisoners, and secured there.

The animal was then tied to the tree, and the three rascals returned to the inn.

Fifteen minutes passed, during which the burro moved around, nibbling the grass here and there, while the feelings of the two lads may be better imagined than described.

Then the young Americans heard a rush of horses' hoofs, and a crowd of horsemen came up and surrounded tree and burro.

One of them dismounted, and taking the animal's leading rope in his hand remounted, and the whole party started off down the mountain slope.

Judging from the way the crowd carried on the rascals seemed out on a kind of a holiday expedition.

Domingo led the advance with the two sailors, and piloted the way along a different route to that by which the prisoners had been brought to the inn.

In the course of an hour they left the range, emerging out on a grassy plain, with a broad river stretching to the left and right as far as one could see in either direction.

A straggling wood grew within a hundred yards of the stream, and here the party halted, dismounted, and tied their horses.

The burro was led down to the bank of the stream by Domingo, two natives following close behind with spear-tipped poles, and the crowd stretching out in the rear.

The boys and the barrel were removed from the animal's back by the two gaucho companions of Domingo.

Having bound the boys to their frail float, the two gauchos pushed them out into the stream with long poles.

The current of the Orinoco now swept the boys away, and a yell of glee escaped the crowd.

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Will. "We shall be drowned."

Jack, whose head was alongside his friend's, made no reply.

He realized that their situation was fraught with the gravest peril.

They were literally adrift on the mighty Orinoco.

CHAPTER X.

THE DESERTED FLAT-BOAT.

As the barrel bobbed up and down in the stream the heads of the boys rose and fell with it.

Sometimes their faces were a foot above the river, and sometimes the water washed across their mouths and noses, almost strangling them.

Often the barrel swung around and gave them each a full view of their enemies, who had remounted their horses and were keeping pace with their progress along the bank.

The fellows shouted and gesticulated as if they enjoyed the spectacle hugely.

"This is our finish," groaned Will.

"It looks like it," admitted Jack, though he tried to keep his spirits up.

"Another duck or two and it will be all up with me."

"Hold your breath when you feel the barrel sinking."

"It bobs down too quick."

"Keep cool and watch out."

"What's the use? It's only a question of time when the water will finish us."

"Don't get discouraged. Hang on to your life for all you are worth. Who knows but something will happen to pull us out of this."

"No such luck."

The conversation was carried on under difficulties, and to Will's last remark Jack made no reply.

They were floating further and further out from the shore where their enemies were gloating over their hard lot, and going down with the stream at a moderate pace.

For nearly an hour the rascals on the bank watched them, and then tiring of the amusement the whole bunch turned their horses and rode off toward the range, leaving their victims to their fate.

The rope that held the boys to the barrel, as well as the ropes that bound their arms and legs, had now become so water soaked that Jack, in an effort to shift his position, found he could draw one of his arms out of the loop that confined it.

"Here, what are you doing?" cried Will, as the barrel bobbed about in the water under Jack's movements.

"I've got one arm free and I'm trying to release the other," replied Jack. "The ropes are loose. Why don't you try and get your arms out, too?"

Will did try, and succeeded quite as well as his friend.

"We're not a whole lot better off," said Will. "Our legs are still tied, and we are bound to the barrel."

"If we could get free from the barrel we could swim ashore."

"You might be able to, but I couldn't."

"Why not? You can swim, can't you?"

"Not much. At any rate, not as far as the shore."

"Well, I'm going to try and work this barrel shoreward with my arms," said Jack.

He began to carry that plan into effect, but the current worked against him, handicapped as he was with the barrel to pull, and his friend's weight, too.

The boys were now being swept around a bend in the river, and right before them they saw a large object floating directly in their path ahead.

It was bulky and unwieldy and went along much slower than they did.

"What's that ahead?" asked Will. "Looks like a house." Jack worked around so as to look.

"It's a kind of flat boat with a low house built on it," he said. "It is right in our way, and we are overtaking it fast."

"We must try and get hold of it," said Will. "Maybe we could manage to get on board. I'd sooner float down the river on that than on this barrel."

"Leave it to me and I'll see what I can do. It lies so low in the water that we ought to have no great difficulty in connecting with it," said Jack.

The trend of the current kept them right in the track of the flat-boat, and they came up with it fast.

They had seen from the first that the boat appeared to be deserted, for there was no one looking after it; that didn't prove that there might not be several persons asleep inside the house, which appeared to be a kind of double-decked cabin.

At length the tide carried barrel and boys right up against the stern of the strange native craft, and Jack, reaching out his hands, caught hold on top of the wood-work.

Will was able to hold with one hand, and by working around got his other hand on the boat.

"Let's try and scramble up," said Jack. "Now then, both together."

The effort was a total failure, handicapped as they were by their tied feet and the barrel at their back.

The latter, though light, clung to the water somewhat, and greatly impeded their movements.

"What are we going to do, Jack?" asked Will. "Unless one of us can get loose from this barrel I don't see how we are going to get aboard."

"We'll both get loose in a moment," replied Jack.

"How will we?"

"Easily. I've just remembered that I have a jack-knife in my pocket. I don't see why I didn't think of it before. You hold on tight and steady the barrel and give me a chance to fish out the knife," replied Jack.

"Got a knife, have you? That's lucky. I'll hold on for all I'm worth."

Jack felt for his knife, but the effort carried his face under the water.

He didn't mind that a bit, for he was accustomed to diving, and could remain beneath the surface as long as any good swimmer.

He got hold of his knife, drew it out and opened the big blade with his teeth.

Then he proceeded to separate himself from the barrel.

This was not as easy as it seemed to be, for the water-soaked strands resisted the blade a lot more than if they had been dry.

It took him fully ten minutes to cut through the two loops, and as the same loops also held Will, he told his friend not to let go his hold under any consideration.

While cutting the rope he held on to the flat-boat with his left hand so as to support himself out of the water.

At last he was free of the barrel, and throwing the knife on the craft he pulled himself up and rolled aboard.

"Hold on, Will, I'll pull you in just as soon as I cut my legs free," he said.

This job took him about five minutes, and then grabbing his companion by the arms, hauled him up and over the stern of the boat.

The barrel left to itself did not float away, but clung close to the stern of the flat-boat, held there by the pressure of the current.

In a few minutes Will's legs were free, and both boys stood up.

"Shake, old man," said Will, in a tone of satisfaction. "We are out of that peril at any rate."

They shook hands in a hearty way.

"I was afraid all the time we were tied to that barrel that it might fill with water by degrees and drag us under. Just

think if the bung came out of it. We'd have gone to the bottom in no time."

"The bung didn't come out, and consequently we didn't go to the bottom. That shows we have luck with us, and with luck in our favor we'll get out of our scrape in the course of time."

"We were lucky to run foul of this boat. Let's look at her. She seems to be floating aimlessly down the river without any one on board."

The house, which occupied the greater part of the odd craft, was about twelve feet high.

The end facing the boys had a low door, which was partly open, and some feet above it a small, square window without any sash—just an opening left there to admit light and air to the interior.

Jack pushed the door open and looked inside.

There was another door at the other end, which stood open, and a window on either side.

The height of the room was not over seven feet, and there stood a ladder near by communicating through a good-sized hole with a loft which was lighted by the opening above the door, and by another opening at the other end which the boys, of course, could not see.

There was a table in the room, and shelves around the wall, and rough stools, evidently of native manufacture, as well as barrels and hampers ranged about, which Jack suspected was the cargo the craft carried.

There was no sign of any human beings, however, and the boy wondered if they were asleep in the loft.

Before venturing to see what was there the boys inspected the lower part first.

To their great satisfaction they found a cask full of fresh water, and a hamper full of provisions, such as rice cakes, a brown looking bread, part of a roasted pig, and a plentiful supply of fruit, some of it not yet quite ripe.

"Here's luck!" cried Will. "We won't starve with all this to feed on."

He sampled a slice of pig and ate a rice cake, an example followed by Jack.

They were not very hungry, having had a good meal at the inn before their enemies started in to dispose of them in the manner already described.

Hanging on the wall they saw an old cutlas, which had come from some warship.

On one of the shelves lay a navy revolver in its leather holster or sheath, and beside it a box heaping full of cartridges.

Jack took possession of the revolver and filled his pockets with cartridges.

An examination of the weapon showed that every chamber was already loaded.

"Say, I'll bet the people who belong to this craft are asleep upstairs," said Will. "This boat wouldn't be deserted in this shape, with cargo and provisions enough for a cruise aboard. It doesn't look reasonable."

"I agree with you. Well, if the people are aboard they are certainly taking things easy. One of them ought to be awake looking out for the boat," said Jack. "It might go ashore somewhere if it wasn't kept in the middle of the stream."

"I didn't see any rudder in the stern where we came

on board," said Will. "How do you suppose this craft is controlled?"

"See those two long poles forward?" said Jack, pointing through the door. "If the boat gets too close to either bank the navigators can fend off with them till a sweep of the tide carries the craft out into the stream again."

"I see," replied Will. "Well, let's take a peep upstairs. I'll slip up and look. If the people are there I'll hold up my fingers, showing how many there are of them. If it should happen that the boat is really deserted, so much the better for us. We'll boss the craft to suit ourselves."

"I have an idea you won't find anybody there," said Jack, almost confidently.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because we've already made noise enough around here to awaken most any sleeper, and the natives of this country are generally easily aroused, for they have good ears, better than the average civilized person."

"Then how do you account for the boat being adrift without its crew?"

"It might have broken loose from its moorings while the people were all ashore attending to some business," replied Jack.

"That's so," agreed Will; "but they'd have chased it in some light craft, wouldn't they, as soon as they found it gone?"

"They may be following it now for all we know."

"If they are I hope they won't catch up with it."

"If they can't catch this lumbering craft they're worse than snails. We're traveling as slow as molasses from a bughole."

With more confidence than before that he would find the loft empty, Will mounted the ladder and poked his head through the hole in the ceiling.

The two small square windows furnished enough light for him to see the interior of the loft pretty clearly.

"Well, what do you see?" asked Jack, preparing to follow when Will got up out of the way.

"I see four straw beds."

"Anybody in them?"

"No."

"Then there's nobody up there?"

"No, not a—good gracious, what's that?"

"What's the matter?" asked Jack.

Will's answer was a loud cry of terror.

He let go his hold on the floor and tumbled back on top of Jack, sending him to the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

UP AGAINST A SNAKE.

"What in thunder is the matter with you, Will?" cried Jack, extricating himself from his companion's struggling body.

"Oh, my, let's get away from this boat as soon as we can," cried Will, making a break for the forward door.

Jack looked after him in astonishment.

"What could he have seen up there that startled him so?" he asked himself. "He said there was no one up there. I must take a look myself."

He placed one foot on the lower rung of the ladder and was about to spring up, when some strange kind of object

glided to the edge of the trap and Jack found himself looking into a pair of scintillating eyes.

The head in which the eyes were imbedded, like a pair of glittering diamonds, slipped forward and hung down, swinging to and fro with a sinuous motion.

It was a good thing for the plucky boy that he did not lose his presence of mind under the baleful glare of the uncanny live thing above or it would have been all up with him in short order.

He saw at once that the object was the head of a huge snake, such as inhabit the wilds of certain parts of Venezuela, and he knew if the reptile reached him it would mean his finish.

He jumped back from the ladder as quickly as he could and retired as far as the table.

Will, by this time, was perched as far forward as he could go, shivering at the recollection of what he had just seen in the loft.

The snake was clearly bent on following Jack's movements, for it lowered its neck and a section of its round body through the hole, and turning its eyes toward the boy, began to swing to and fro like the pendulum of a clock.

Jack watched the snake for a moment or two and then he recollected the revolver he had strapped about his waist.

Drawing the weapon from its holster he cocked it, took aim as well as he could at the swinging object, and blazed away.

A loud, horrible hiss followed the report, and when the smoke cleared from before Jack's eyes the snake had disappeared, but the boy could hear it thumping about overhead.

"I hit it," he muttered, cocking the revolver again in readiness for a second encounter with the enormous reptile.

It didn't reappear, but it was carrying on at a fierce rate in the loft, which seemed to indicate that it had been badly wounded.

The hiss it gave out at intervals was something awful to listen to, and it made the boys shiver.

By degrees it grew quiet and ceased hissing.

Jack, however, did not care to venture up the ladder to investigate matters, for he had an idea that the reptile was lying in wait for him.

He walked to the door and beckoned to Will.

"Did you kill it?" asked Will, tremulously, as he came reluctantly forward.

"No, but I wounded it badly I think. Did you hear it?"

"Did I? Do you think I'm deaf?"

"It's a fierce monster."

"I should say so. It came out from under two of the straw beds, raised its head and looked at me. The moment I saw what it was I got away from that hole as soon as I could."

"I should say you did. You came down with a rush and knocked me spinning, for I was standing right underneath you. It's a good thing you didn't fall far or you would probably have knocked me out, and then the snake would have come down and made a meal off me."

"It's mighty lucky you found that revolver."

"I should say so. You had better take that cutlas, for the snake might come down at any moment, and I might miss it."

"I wonder how it came aboard this craft?" said Will,

hastening to take down the cutlas, which had a fairly keen edge.

"The craft must have been moored up some stream close to a woods, and probably being hungry it came aboard on a foraging expedition."

"Do you think it's eaten the crew?"

"Eaten your grandmother—no. If it had eaten one of them that would have been a full meal, and then it would have been comatose for some time. The fact that it's so lively shows that it is ready for a meal if it can get it."

"I don't intend to offer myself as a choice morsel," said Will, with a shudder.

"This snake furnishes the solution of the cause of this craft being deserted. It is clear to me that its presence was discovered by the people after they got afloat, and they were so frightened that they all jumped overboard and swam ashore, leaving the boat and the snake to take care of themselves."

"You've struck it," nodded Will. "Now look here, what are we going to do with it on board? If it's hungry it is sure to try and reach us. You could swim ashore if you had to, but I couldn't. If I went overboard I'd be drowned as sure as fate."

"With that cutlas and this revolver I think we ought to be able to do up Mr. Snake," said Jack.

"You wouldn't catch me going near enough to him to stick him," said Will. "I know what snakes are. They get around you in no time and squeeze you into a jelly. I mean snakes as big as this one."

"They can't do much squeezing unless they can get their tail anchored around a tree, or something else that will give them the chance to brace themselves."

"How do you know they can't?"

"I've heard so."

"They can poison you with their stinger, can't they?"

"Small snakes of a venomous kind do, but whether the big ones do I can't say."

"Are you going to try and shoot this one?"

"I certainly will do my best if he comes down here."

"I think we'd better roost on the roof of the house to-night."

"The snake could crawl out of one of those small windows and get up there as well as it could come down here."

"Suppose it comes down in the dark, how are you going to see it to kill it? I guess a snake can see better at night than it can in the daytime, while we can't see at all in the dark."

"There's a lantern inside here which we can light as soon as it gets dark. That will illuminate the room."

"That's something, but still I don't like the idea of passing the night on this boat in company with that snake."

"I don't see how we can avoid it and better ourselves. Here is a good boat with plenty of provisions on board on which we can float down to civilization. We are a long distance out in the wilderness, and if we should leave the boat we'd surely starve. Between two evils I think the snake is the lesser one since we are armed and able to protect ourselves."

The boys got a couple of stools and sat down near the door inside of the room.

While they continued to converse they kept their eyes on the opening at the top of the ladder.

They also watched the two doors, for it was not unlikely that the snake might let itself out by way of one of the small windows at either end of the house.

Jack was cool and collected, but Will was manifestly nervous.

The boys talked over what they had gone through since they started out of Georgetown harbor on that unlucky sail which had ended in their being cast away on the Venezuelan shore.

"I feel sorry for my father," said Will. "He has surely concluded long before this that I am at the bottom of the sea, and I don't know how he will be able to write the news home to my mother. The chances are he will not send her word, but leave her in ignorance of my fate until he reaches home and breaks it to her himself."

"When did he expect to sail for the States?" asked Jack.

"Not for some little time, as his business is by no means completed in Georgetown."

"If that is so you may turn up before he leaves, and that will save your mother an unnecessary shock."

"I hope so. I'd give a whole lot to be able to jump in on my dad and surprise him. He'd kill the fatted calf for me, as the saying is."

"You're lucky to have somebody ready to do that for you. There is no fatted calf awaiting me if I should be so lucky as to turn up in Georgetown or anywhere else," said Jack.

"Well, we won't whistle till we're out of the woods. Our prospects at present look kind of dubious."

"I don't agree with you. I think they are quite bright, leaving the snake out of the matter."

"But we can't leave the snake out. We've got to count on him giving us a lot of—oh, Lord! There he is now at the back door."

Will nearly fell off his stool as he spoke.

Jack saw the snake hanging down, evidently from the little window astern, and poking its head in at the open door.

"Don't run, Will," he said. "If you've got the nerve we can trap him now before he gets in here."

"How?" asked Will.

"I'm going to run over quick and slam the door to on his neck. That will leave his head inside. Then you can cut it to pieces with the cutlas."

Jack saw that no time was to be lost if that maneuver was to be carried out successfully.

He made a quick dash for the door before the snake had slid any further out of the window, and as the reptile made a dart at him he pushed the door against its neck and held it with all his strength.

"Quick, Will, now is your time, before it gets away from me," he shouted.

Will advanced gingerly and made a cut at the snake's head.

He missed it.

"Get closer. Don't be afraid. Work quick or he may get away," said Jack, who wasn't sure he could hold the door tight against the slippery and squirming reptile.

Will made another blow at the snake and this time inflicted a bad cut on its head.

It hissed so and shot out its forked tongue that Will fell back.

"Get at it again or come here and hold the door."

Will was clearly afraid of tackling the snake even when it was in his power.

He seized hold of a heavy crate and shoved it against the end of the door, thinking to crush the snake between the edge of the door and the jamb, but it didn't work.

It held the snake fast, however, and gave Jack a chance to get busy.

He drew his revolver and put five bullets into the reptile's brain, which settled its hash for good.

"That's the end of Mr. Snake," said Jack in a tone of satisfaction.

Its head was reduced to a mere bleeding pulp, held by the closed door.

"Lord, how glad I am!" cried Will. "I'll never forget this experience as long as I live."

They waited for an hour, and as the sun was setting Jack pulled the crate away and opened the door.

The snake was limp and lifeless.

It was all out of the window and was a monster, capable of squeezing a bullock to death easily.

With the aid of one of the poles they managed to push the body over into the river, and when it disappeared beneath the surface with a splash the boys felt that an incubus had been lifted from their minds.

Ten minutes afterward darkness fell over the landscape, but the sky was so brilliant with stars that they could see some distance ahead down the river.

The lantern was lighted, and then they had their supper.

They sat talking awhile, chiefly about the unfortunate situation of Jessie Gale, who was a prisoner in the hands of the rascally band in the mountain range to the west, and figuring on schemes for her rescue, and then they turned in on two of the straw beds in the loft of the log cabin and slept until morning, letting the flat-boat navigate itself down the river, as it had done since they came aboard.

CHAPTER XII.

WILL ALMOST HAS A FIT.

Several uneventful days passed, and during that time the flat-boat made but slow headway down the Orinoco.

Evidently speed was of small importance to the navigators who owned it.

Will declared that they could walk faster if they were ashore.

"Possibly we might," said Jack, "but it is much more comfortable to ride in the shade of the cabin than to walk in the hot sun. Then think of the trouble of carrying provisions along with us, with the probability of them giving out before we reached a town. Slow and sure is a good motto to follow. There are towns somewhere on this river, and we are bound to reach one in time. I consider that we struck luck when we hit this boat."

At this time the Orinoco was passing through a broad and level tract that looked more like a desert than anything else.

Thus far they had not seen a human being on the river, though they had seen horsemen on the shore at long intervals.

That afternoon a sailboat manned by three natives passed them going west.

They took that as a sign that they were drawing toward civilization.

On the following day they were still in the midst of the desert tract, their progress not being fast enough to carry them through it.

Along about noon the breeze which had somewhat tempered the heat died out and the heat became so intense that they grew drowsy and retired to the loft to sleep till night came on.

While they slept the sky grew dark and threatening, and a terrific thunder storm came up.

It was preceded by a furious wind which came diagonally across the river, and forced the flat-boat over toward the opposite shore.

It did more than that.

It forced the boat up a tributary of the Orinoco which emptied into it at this point, and finally landed the boat on a shoal, for the tide was low at the time.

The shock of the boat striking the shore awakened Jack and he poked his head out of the window to see what was up.

He was surprised at the gloom in the air, and roaring of the wind, for everything had been as still as death when they went to sleep.

He was more surprised to notice that the boat was ashore.

He went down the ladder and out on the forward deck, and saw that the boat had grounded hard and fast on the shore.

"Here's a stroke of hard luck again. We're stranded in the desert. This stream doesn't look like the Orinoco. It must be one of its branches we have run into somehow. I'm afraid we're a fixture, and will have to tramp it the rest of the way to the nearest town."

Looking out over the landscape Jack saw a curious looking tree, withered and dead, standing like a lone sentinel a short distance from the water, and not far from a great rock that rose, like a sunken dome, out of the ground.

Something bright and shiny hung on the tree, and Jack's curiosity was aroused as he gazed at it through the gloom, and he wondered what it was.

It looked so weird in the red glare of the lightning that he determined to run over and take a look at it.

The distance was not far, and he felt sure that he could get back before the storm burst upon them.

Accordingly he jumped ashore and started for the tree.

As he approached it he saw that it was but a hollow shell, the whole interior having decayed after the trunk had been split open, in all probability by a thunderbolt.

The shiny object proved to be merely the bleached interior which had been worn smooth and white by the weather, giving it a spectral effect in the gloom, and under the lurid gleam of the lightning.

Hardly had Jack ascertained that fact than the storm swooped down with such terrific force that he dared not return to the boat, but decided to take shelter inside the great hollow tree, so he stepped inside.

It was at that moment that Will was aroused by a tremendous crash.

He sat up and looked around him, and was astonished to find the loft wrapped in darkness.

A tremendous pounding sound came from the roof which the boy soon realized was made by a fearful downpour of rain.

As he rubbed his eyes a vivid flash of lightning lit up

every corner of the loft for a moment, and another awful crash shook the stranded boat from stem to stern.

Will, however, was not aware that the boat was no longer moving down the Orinoco, but ashore on the bank of a branch stream a quarter of a mile from its mouth.

The glare of the lightning showed Will that he was alone.

"The storm must have aroused Jack, and he has gone downstairs," he thought. "It's a corking heavy one. Gee! what a flash!"

The flash was followed as before by a tremendous peal.

"I thought the roof was falling in that time. I'll go down and see what Jack is doing."

He crawled over to the ladder and looked down through the opening.

For the moment he could see nothing, though both doors were partially open, so intense was the darkness, then the lightning lit up the room and he saw every corner of it.

To his surprise Jack was not there.

"Why where could he have gone?" he asked himself. "He is not up here, and if he isn't below he must be out on deck. He wouldn't walk out in such a storm as this—no unless he was crazy, and it isn't likely there is anything the matter with his brains. Then what in thunder has become of him?"

Will slipped down the ladder, went to the door and looked out.

He was fairly staggered by what the lightning revealed to his eyes.

"Good Lord, we are ashore!" he gasped.

What was even worse, Jack was nowhere in sight.

The clouds above were like thick masses of soot, working like the surface of the ocean in a storm, only reversed, and so close to the earth that it seemed to the almost terrified Will, who had never seen anything in his life approaching it, as if they were descending in a heavy mass to suffocate the landscape below.

The tremendous sound of the thunder was due to its nearness.

It tore things up generally.

Will was greatly alarmed over Jack's disappearance, particularly at such a time as that.

It was impossible for him to account for it.

He was frightened, too, at the fierceness of the storm, for he feared that a thunderbolt might strike the boat and destroy it, in which case he would surely perish himself.

He retired to a corner and huddled up like an animal overcome by terror.

There he remained for a whole hour while the storm raged like legions of fiends on the rampage.

Gradually it worked off to the northwest, and the sky lightened up.

The worst over, Will got up, feeling like a wreck, and went to the door again.

"I don't see where he could have gone to," said Will, more uneasy than ever. "Surely he couldn't have fallen into the river and been borne away. If he were anywhere within half a mile I am sure I could see him. I can't imagine any reason that would have taken him off the boat in that storm. I never felt so lonesome in all my life. If anything has happened to him I see my finish, too. I couldn't go on alone to save my life. The boat is stranded anyway, and that settles the trip down the river. The Orinoco seems

to have got mighty narrow all at once. It doesn't look like the same river."

He walked dispiritedly back into the cabin, and seating himself on one of the stools, gave himself up to gloomy forebodings about the future.

Fifteen minutes passed away and then there came the sound of steps outside.

He looked up and saw Jack stepping up to the door.

He sprang up and rushed to meet him.

"Where in creation have you been, Jack?" he cried. "I have been worried to death almost over your mysterious absence. I couldn't make out where you had gone."

"Oh, I woke up a couple of hours ago, just before the storm came on, and discovered that we had gone ashore somewhere up on a branch stream of the Orinoco."

"Where were you during the storm?"

"On shore."

"And didn't you get wet?"

"I don't look as if I did, do I?"

"No. Where did you find shelter? I only saw one dead tree in sight, and that wouldn't shelter a person as thin as a walking stick from such a tempest."

"I was in the snuggest place in the world, where the storm didn't bother me at all. When I tell you everything you'll open your eyes pretty wide. I left this boat as poor as Job's turkey; now I'm a sort of Monte Cristo. I'm worth enough coin to start a couple of national banks."

"What are you talking about?"

"Think I've suddenly turned lightheaded?" grinned Jack.

"I think you're talking rag-time. Explain yourself. What do you mean by saying that you are now a kind of Monte Carlo?"

"Because I'm worth lots of money—loads of it," and Jack's eyes sparkled. "I can see the stuff now lying around in boxes just as somebody broke it open. Why that person never carried it away is a mystery to me."

Will looked at Jack in some trepidation.

He believed the sun had affected his friend's brain and made him see things that did not exist.

"He's as crazy as a bedbug," breathed Will, much alarmed over the seeming condition of his friend.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK'S STORY.

"I told you that luck might come our way again, and there is the evidence of it."

Thus speaking, Jack took a handful of gold coin from his pocket and exhibited it before the astonished eyes of his friend.

"Where in creation did you find that money?" cried Will.

"In a cave near here, and if there isn't all of \$100,000 there I shall be surprised."

"A hundred thousand!" exclaimed Will.

"Every dollar of it," replied Jack in a positive tone.

"I guess you're stretching things, Jack," said Will.

"No, I'm not. Well, there are six boxes of those yellow boys besides a lot of silver ingots in the cave I tumbled into."

"Six boxes full of them! How big are the boxes?" asked the amazed Will.

Jack indicated the size.

"Gosh! What a lot of money! And you say there are silver ingots besides?"

"Quite a pile of them."

"How did that stuff get there?"

"How should I know?"

"Where is this cave?"

"Right opposite here."

"How came you to tumble into it? It must be underground at that rate."

"The entrance to it is through the trunk of a hollow tree near a big rock which you can see from the door. The tree looks as if it's been dead for a very long time, probably killed by a thunderbolt, which doubtless tore open the trunk. I was over there when the storm came up, and I stepped into the tree to avoid getting wet if possible. Before I knew what was going to happen I fell through a hole and landed nearly a dozen feet below the surface all in a heap. My first idea was that I was in a bad scrape. You were asleep in the boat here and therefore I could expect no help from you. I was in thick darkness and could not tell how deep I had fallen. I knew that if I couldn't get out I could see my finish by slow starvation. The thought wasn't a pleasant one I can assure you."

"I should say not," said Will.

"I could hear the crash of the storm outside. That, however, did not bother me. The storm would be over in time, but no amount of time might help me out of my predicament."

"How did you get out?" asked Will, much interested.

"The first thing I did was to feel around the hole. You, no doubt, would have done the same had you been in my shoes."

"I guess I would."

"At first I could feel nothing but a great void. Moving around I clutched a most extraordinary thing."

"What was that?"

"A rope ladder."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, hanging down almost directly under the hole through which I had fallen. I was so astonished that I felt it some moments before I got the fact into my head. It seemed amazing to me that a rope ladder should be hanging there at the base of an old dead tree in the desert."

"It certainly was," nodded Will. "Go on. This is getting very interesting."

"Having satisfied myself that it really was a ladder, and finding that it was securely anchored somewhere above, I started to climb it, for my most earnest desire just then was to escape from that awful black hole."

"I'd have done the same thing. I wouldn't have waited a minute."

"I climbed up and found that the top of the ladder was fastened to one of the big roots that ran off somewhere underground. I found I could easily step up to the opening in the tree trunk and thus escape. You can't imagine how relieved I felt. It was just as if a big load was taken from my spirits."

"I guess so," said Will.

"The storm was in full swing, so I concluded I couldn't

do better, now that I possessed the means of going up and down in safety, than to return to the hole below and stay there till the storm was over."

"You did right. It was the fiercest storm I've ever seen in my life. I was scared badly, I am willing to admit, but probably I wouldn't have felt so rattled had you been with me, but you see I did not know where you were. I could hardly imagine you out in the storm, but I knew you were not on the boat. I was worried about you, and that made my situation worse," said Will.

"You must excuse me, old chap, for leaving you, but I didn't expect to be so long away."

"That's all right. Go on with your story. I want to hear how you found that gold and the silver ingots."

"The first thing I did, thinking I was only in a dirt hole, was to squat down and wonder how soon the storm would blow over so I could get back to the boat."

"Never mind that. I want to hear about your discovery."

"I crouched there for perhaps an hour while the storm grew heavier and heavier. The lightning as it grew brighter penetrated through the hollow trunk, and lit up the hole quite a bit. At first I took little notice of this, but after awhile I was surprised to notice that the place I was in was larger than I suspected. I finally got tired of doing nothing, got up and felt around to ascertain the extent of this underground hole. I was not particularly curious about the matter at first, but when I worked along the wall, and the place seemed to run for some distance under the earth, I began to wonder what freak of nature I was exploring."

"Well?" said Will, as Jack paused.

"I ran against a kind of shelf and upset something that was on it. I stopped and felt around, and my fingers encountered a small paste-board box. I picked it up and soon discovered it was a large box full of matches."

"Matches!" cried Will. "What luck!"

Will nodded.

"The moment I found that the box contained matches I struck one, for light was what I needed in that place. The match flared up and I saw I was in a stone cave, which, judging from the direction I had followed, is somewhere under that dome-shaped rock you can see from the door."

Will got up, went to the door and looked out.

"I see it," he said.

Jack followed him outside and continued his story.

"The first thing I noticed was a number of boxes bearing the stamp of a well-known American canning establishment. I supposed they were empty, but to my astonishment and satisfaction I found the top one half filled with cans of preserved meat."

"You don't mean it!" cried Will, in astonishment.

"I do mean it. I found a lantern on a shelf and lighted it. Then I examined all the cases, and finding them heavy, concluded they were full of canned goods. There was also a case of crackers and two cases of ale, which had also been imported from the United States. I found there was enough food to supply our wants for a long time. It was then the idea occurred to me of an easy and convenient way of continuing our journey."

"What was your idea?" asked Will, curiously.

"To build a raft."

"How?" asked his companion in surprise.

"Why, by pulling enough of this house to pieces to make one."

"Your plan is a fine one, provided we can put such a raft together."

"After I discovered the provisions I looked around to see what else was in the cave, and I found the boxes of gold coin, all broken open, and the bars of silver ingots."

"I must go and see them," said Will, eagerly.

"That's easy," said Jack.

"The presence of the provisions as well as the treasure in that cave would indicate that the place is the secret rendezvous of a gang of robbers, don't you think?" said Will.

"That is what it appears to be. I'm not going to worry over it. We will help ourselves to the provisions and the treasure, and make the best use we can of both. We can lay claim to them by right of discovery, since as far as we know they have been abandoned, owing to circumstances over which the persons who had previous claim to them had no control."

"That's right," said Will. "Now take me to the cave."

"Come on," said Jack.

Will followed him with great alacrity, for he was all eagerness to get a sight of the treasure in the cave.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

Jack led the way to the old dead tree, with its hollow trunk, and striking a match held it so that Will could see where the rope ladder hung.

"Go down first, and wait for me at the bottom," said Jack.

Will did so without hesitation, and Jack presently joined him.

"Come on this way," said Jack, taking his friend by the arm.

A minute or so later Jack said, "Here we are in the cave."

He struck a match and lighted the lantern, which he held up and swung around.

Will saw the cases of provisions, the shelves and sundry other articles, but no treasure.

"Where's the money?" he asked.

Jack pushed ahead a few feet and then flashed the lantern into a sort of alcove.

There were six boxes full of Spanish gold coin, and the pile of silver wedges ready for the mint.

"Lift one of the boxes and you will see that though pretty heavy still, it is not too heavy for us to handle."

"I should think there might be about \$15,000 in this box," said Will, after he had tested its weight. "We'll have to put new covers on them so as to conceal the nature of their contents from the curious eyes of the natives of this country."

"We'll count the pieces, but we'll have to estimate their value at \$10 each, for I have no idea of their actual worth," said Jack.

Accordingly they counted the number of coins in one of the boxes and found there were 1,500 of them.

They estimated that the six boxes footed up between \$90,000 and \$100,000.

The silver wedges were small and molded all of one size.

The boys could form no clear idea of their value as they stood, though they estimated each at about thirty pounds of bullion.

On that basis, after counting the ingots, they judged there was over half a ton of silver in the lot.

After they had satisfied their curiosity concerning the treasure they found a hatchet and a box of nails.

"These will come in handy in building the raft," said Jack.

After a good breakfast next morning they set to work on the raft without delay.

Thus they put in several days, without seeing a soul in all that time, and then they had the raft completed, though they were not sure it would sustain all the weight they wished to trust to it.

Nothing remained now but to pack the treasure securely and transfer it to the raft.

They used the provision boxes to hold the ingots, and piled a portion of the provisions wherever they could find a place for the stuff, leaving the rest in the cave.

All being ready, they trusted their deeply laden craft to the tide of the stream early one morning, and by noon were in sight of the Orinoco.

With the aid of a pole they managed to steer their craft into the big river, and the current catching it they began their slow sail down the stream.

Three days later, after passing several small towns and villages, they reached Barrancas, at the mouth of the river.

Leaving Will in charge of the raft, Jack, with his pockets full of the Spanish gold pieces, stepped ashore to try and make arrangements for the transportation of themselves and their treasure out of Venezuela.

He found a large schooner about to sail for Georgetown, and had no difficulty in coming to terms with her skipper, who was an Englishman.

The treasure was taken aboard the craft and placed in the hold, the sailors who handled it marveling much at the weight of the boxes.

Two days later they reached Georgetown, and Will lost no time in going ashore to find his father.

When he entered the hotel at which he had been a guest with his father, the clerk nearly had a fit on recognizing him.

"Good Lord, young man, where have you been?" he ejaculated. "Your father is about wild over your disappearance."

"I've been up in Venezuela," replied Will.

"Venezuela!" exclaimed the clerk. "Then the boat in which you and your friend went off sailing that day escaped the gale?"

"No, it didn't. It held out as far as the delta of the Orinoco, and then went ashore, but we both escaped, luckily. Say, will you break the news of my return to my father? It wouldn't do for me to meet him unexpectedly."

Five minutes later Will was in his father's arms.

That afternoon Mr. Merritt, after having heard the story told by both lads, which, of course, greatly astonished him, had the treasure unloaded from the schooner and deposited in the vaults of one of the banks.

Jack then brought up the subject of the rescue of Jessie Gale from the robber band, and insisted that no time ought to be lost.

He proposed to organize an expedition sufficiently strong to cope successfully with the rascals, and head it himself.

Mr. Merritt objected to this, particularly as Will wanted to accompany Jack.

When he found Jack determined to do it anyway, he agreed to it, and said he would go with the expedition too.

He advanced the necessary funds to charter a large schooner, and secure about thirty well-armed men, and one morning the vessel sailed out of Georgetown harbor, and on the second day thereafter was working her way up the Orinoco River.

The boys had the landmarks down pretty fine and pointed out the spot for landing.

The expedition started for the mountains at dark, and came in sight of the lone inn before daybreak.

The building was surrounded, and as most of the rascals happened to be away on an expedition, the attacking party had little difficulty in forcing an entrance into the inn and carrying all before them.

Jack found the room where Jessie was confined, and was the first to tell her that she was free.

The expedition having accomplished its object, returned to Georgetown, where a cablegram was sent to Mr. Gale, who had just about reached New York, informing him of the rescue of his daughter, and that Mr. Merritt would see that she reached the United States all right.

The treasure was duly appraised and proved to be worth \$150,000.

It was arranged that Jack should have two-thirds of it, Will taking the other third.

Jack, looking quite a young gentleman in appropriate clothes, took passage on Mr. Merritt's yacht with Will, and with him went Jessie Gale.

The two young people were already lovers, and with Will, enjoyed the trip to New York greatly.

Mr. Gale was on hand to welcome his daughter, and he invited Jack to go with them to his house, an invitation our hero promptly accepted.

Jack afterward paid Will a visit just before his friend returned to school.

While Will was finishing his education Jack started in business, and did well from the start.

When Jack married Jessie, Will was best man at the wedding, and after that was the most welcome visitor at the home of the young couple, where he and Jack often talked over the time when they were sent adrift on the Orinoco.

THE END.

Read "SILENT SAM OF WALL STREET; OR, A WONDERFUL RUN OF LUCK," which will be the next number (246) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

A thirty-pound chinook salmon was literally caught by hand the other day at the Oregon Railway and Navigation wharf by a man who saw it floundering in the mud after the tide had gone out. It had evidently been caught in one of the holes on the inside of the wharf and as the tide receded was left in the mud. Its captor took the string from his shoe and, slipping it through the gills of the salmon, brought it ashore.

Although most of the writing in the conducting of a railway is done on typewriters, it still takes 1,000,000 pen points a year to help keep the trains running on the Northern Pacific and Great Northern roads. This is at the rate of sixty-six for every mile of the two roads. The employees of the two roads also require about 18,000 penholders and 320,000 pencils in a year. This means that for each mile of track thirty pencils are needed in a twelvemonth.

Guy Fawkes was the most notorious of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators. He was born in Kent, England, in 1570, and died on January 31, 1606. In 1604 he became associated with Robert Catesby, Thomas Percy, Thomas Winter, John Wright, and others, in the plot to blow up the Parliament House. The conspirators succeeded in filling a cellar of the Parliament House with barrels of gunpowder, which were to have been exploded by Guy Fawkes on the opening of Parliament on November 5, 1605. He was arrested as he was entering the cellar on the night preceding the day set for the culmination of the plot, and was, after trial, executed, with several of his fellow conspirators.

The enormous demands made upon the world's rubber supply by the ever-increasing needs of the automobile, has brought about an extraordinary condition in the financial affairs of two continents. The source of perhaps three-fourths of the world's supply of first-class rubber is Brazil, more than one thousand miles up the Amazon River. The rest comes from smaller acreages in Panama, the Malay States, the Congo district on the west coast of Africa and India. Ceylon is going into the cultivation of rubber trees, and a good deal of the future supply is expected to come from there and other places where similar scientific methods are adopted. So precious is the commodity becoming that the Brazilian Government, with canny prudence, has virtually cornered the supply by subsidizing the planters in the district of Para, where the Brazilian rubber comes from. The situation is almost parallel with the diamond market—only one country supplies

diamonds in any quantity or quality, that being the Transvaal, which contains the famous Kimberly mines. Meanwhile, a tremendous boom is going on in rubber stocks, most of which are owned in England. Speculation is rife, as many new companies, wildcat and otherwise, are springing up all over the land. In some respects, it is said, the excitement is not unlike that which culminated in the bursting of the historic South Sea bubble. The price has gone up by leaps and bounds, and to-day stands at \$1.25 per pound wholesale for the best quality, which is used by tire manufacturers.

JOKES AND JESTS.

"The girl I marry will have to be possessed of a lot of common sense." "But the girl you marry won't be."

Ted—Does Gayboy believe in the absent treatment? Ned—He must. It costs him a pretty penny to keep his wife away in the country all summer.

Miss Sweet—It is just the sort of engagement ring I preferred. None of my others were nearly so pretty. How thoughtful of you! George—Not at all, dear. This is the ring I have always used.

Gladys—"Oh, mamma! Here's a note from that long-haired pianist. He says it will be impossible for him to play at our reception to-night." Mamma—"What's the trouble?" Gladys—"Some one stole his wig."

She—No, Jack, I'm afraid it's impossible. We should never get on well together. You know I always want my own way so much. He—Well, that's all right. You could go on wanting it after we were married.

He had proposed by telegraph and asked her to telegraph her reply. The regulation tax allows ten words for the minimum fee, and her answer ran: "Yes, gladly, willingly, joyfully, delightedly, gratefully, lovingly, yes, yes, yes."

"Mamma, is the old black hen going to be sent away for the summer?" "No, Tommy. But why do you ask?" "Well, I heard papa tell the new governess that he would take her out riding when he sent the old hen away for the summer."

"Did yez notice about th' joke me brother Tim played on wan av thim chauffeurs?" "I heard a turrible thing happened to him. Poor Tim!" "'Poor Tim' th' divvle! He had a shtick av dinnamite in his pocket whin he wor run over."

"Do you know who that old man is talking to our hostess?" asked Mrs. Blunderer of the lady sitting beside her. "That," answered the woman coldly, "is my son." "Oh!" gasped Mrs. Blunderer, in confusion, "he's a good deal older than you are, is he not?"

Mrs. Marble, after the death of her husband, went to Mr. Stone (a dealer in headstones) and consulted him in reference to an inscription. She said: "Put on it: 'To my dearest husband,' and if there be any room left, 'we shall meet in Heaven.'" Entering the cemetery and going to her husband's grave, she noticed the headstone, and quickly rushed to see how he had engraved it. The poor old widow's heart beat with pain when she read the following on the headstone: "To my dearest husband, and if there be any room left, we shall meet in Heaven."

A WARLIKE WINNING

By W. Stevens.

On the evening of the 13th of February, 1862, the rain and hail came down in torrents. Within Mrs. Sylvester's long, bright-lighted drawing-room her daughter Edith paced up and down impatiently. Every now and then she paused before one of the long windows, and, drawing aside the curtain, gazed eagerly out into the impenetrable darkness of the night. A step sounded behind her; she turned with a bright smile of welcome upon her face. This turned to a look of disappointment, however, when she saw it was only her sister-in-law, Ethel Sylvester.

"Well, Edith, what are you doing? Are you expecting Captain Miller? Ah, I see you are! That blush tells quite a little story."

"Don't be foolish, Ethel. I——"

She paused and laughed gently.

Ethel came over to her quickly, and putting her hand upon Miss Sylvester's arm said:

"Edith, dear, don't you think you are doing wrong in encouraging this Northern officer this way? You know your brother John would not approve of this. Had you not better wait until this dreadful war is over? Until——"

She was here interrupted by the appearance of Captain Miller, who came smiling into the room. He was a Northern officer who had been stationed about a mile from the Sylvesters, further up the Cumberland river. He had met Edith quite by accident one day, and on his part it had been a case of love at sight, while she had at first hated him with all her passionate nature, and with all the strong hatred that the South then felt toward the North.

Gradually she had grown to like him better and better, until now—well, now her hatred was diminished, and secretly she had begun to be indifferent to the fact that the South might not win in the great war then progressing so furiously all around her.

She greeted Captain Miller with an outstretched hand of welcome. Mrs. John Sylvester merely bowed coldly and retired to the furthest corner of the room, while Edith and the captain drew up their chairs before the fire.

"I brought you the music you desired," he said. "I am sorry I could not get it sooner, but it is difficult to get anything by mail in these war times."

"You are very good, Captain Miller. I am sorry to have troubled you. It really was not worth the striving for."

"You were, though," he said gently.

She half rose from her chair.

"I do not understand you," she began, but he interrupted her before she had time to go any further, saying:

"Don't be angry with me, Miss Sylvester. I know I am not worthy of you, but I can't keep silent any longer. I love you. There, it is out! Though you despise me for a Northerner—still I cannot help it—I love you. I truly——"

"Hush!" she whispered. "You must not speak like this. I—I—I do not despise you."

"I may hope?" he began impulsively.

"When you or I are victorious—when the war is over—you may hope," she said gently. "Do not speak of this?" she added, "not to any one; if it should come to Brother John's ears he would be so angry with me—be patient."

"Your brother is a brave man. I would he were on our side," said the captain.

"In his loyalty or in our love?" she asked.

"Both," he answered, smiling. "But what is he like?" asked Captain Miller.

"Most like myself—he is my twin," answered Miss Sylvester.

"Then I shall love him for your sake and his own," answered the captain.

"Mis' Ethel—Mis' Ethel, where are you?" cried a young mulatto girl, hurrying breathlessly into the room.

"Here I am. What is it, Debby?" asked Mrs. John Sylvester, coming forward to meet the girl.

"Mrs. Taylor sent you this yer apple wif 'er love," said the girl, holding out a large, rosy-cheeked apple toward Mrs. John Sylvester.

Ethel reached out her hand to take it, but through some awkwardness on Debby's part it fell to the floor—almost at Captain Miller's feet. As the fruit struck the ground it burst open, disclosing a carefully folded piece of paper of a brownish color. With a cry of alarm Ethel started forward. But Captain Miller, anticipating her, seized the note from its hiding-place and held it tightly in his closed fist.

"Give it to me, Captain Miller," she demanded, haughtily.

"No, not quite so fast, madam. It may be of interest to General Grant. This looks like a secret message of importance."

"But it is my letter," she pleaded, growing pale.

"My country's cause comes before all else," he said, unfolding the note slowly.

"Please—please give it to me," she entreated, most earnestly.

"I would—truly I would—but I cannot." As he began to read the letter Ethel sank pale and faint upon a chair—Edith had not spoken a word, but her countenance displayed the torture through which she was going.

"By Jove!" cried the captain, "I find it is of great interest. It is from your husband. I must be off at once. I grieve to pain you in this matter, but it is my duty. Here, you may read it, but I must keep it."

He held it up for her inspection. Tremblingly the two women read the few lines written upon the crumpled bit of brown paper:

"I will be home to-night at ten o'clock. Leave the door open. Don't tell any one. I have a message of great importance which I must bear to General Floyd at Fort Donelson. I will see you only for a moment. With love,

"JOHN SYLVESTER."

"What will you do, Captain Miller?" Edith asked calmly, looking up into his face.

"Take him prisoner," he answered.

"Have pity!" cried Ethel, sinking on her knees before him. "You cannot be so cruel. Had you not been here—indeed, no one will know. Oh, sir! It is so much to us, so little to you."

"Little? Why, it is my honor," he cried sternly.

"But no one will know," Ethel argued.

"I would," was his answer. "Do not tempt me, Mrs. Sylvester. I am but doing my duty. Would you make a traitor of me? Your husband would do as I am doing, was he in a like position, and you would praise him for it. A traitor I could not be."

The captain put the letter in his pocket.

"Oh, Edith," cried Ethel in despair. "Down—down on your knees and entreat for mercy."

She paused. Something in Edith's face checked her.

"No," was the quiet answer, "I will not. He is only doing his duty."

"But he will kill John—my husband—your brother. Don't you understand, Edith? He will kill your brother."

As Ethel ceased she staggered to her feet and seized Edith's arm.

"I understand, dear. But it is the fortune of war," said Edith, coldly.

Ethel sank weeping upon the sofa.

The captain hurried from the room.

Edith, unmindful, stood for a few minutes as if turned to stone. The clock on the mantle struck nine. She shivered mightily, then turned and hurried from the room.

Ethel lay where she had fallen for a long time, then she started up with a cry as she heard some one moving in the grounds of the house.

She listened. There was no sound save the ticking of the clock, which was upon the stroke of ten. Finally, unable longer to bear the suspense, she seized a candle from the table and passed out into the hall. Her heart beat quickly as she opened the great door and stepped out onto the porch.

"Halt! Who goes there?" cried a gruff voice from the shrubbery.

She dropped her candle as she suddenly realized that the house was surrounded by Captain Miller's men. Faintly she answered:

"It is Mrs. John Sylvester. I want to see Captain Miller—"

"Wait a minute," said the voice.

After a long delay the captain approached, followed by a private bearing a lantern.

"Oh, captain, is there no escape—no alternative?" she asked, anxiously.

"None—lest he delay or does not come."

As the door closed behind her a man came running up the steps full into the light of the lantern, which disclosed to the captain the well-known features, fair hair and peculiar face of a Sylvester.

His cap was gone and his head bound around with a great handkerchief.

He was instantly seized and led away into the shadowy shrubbery.

"It grieves me," said Captain Miller, as they walked on, "it grieves me very much to have to treat you thus rudely."

"It is nothing," said his prisoner. "You are only doing your duty."

"A very unpleasant duty, considering my liking for your people, Mr. Sylvester."

"Colonel Sylvester," said the latter.

"How did you know my name, colonel?"

The prisoner was silent for a few moments, then he said:

"I heard one of your men address you as Captain Miller."

"Where are you going to take me, Captain Miller?"

"To one of the gunboats just out here on the river," was the answer.

"But we may be fired upon from Fort Donelson," suggested Sylvester.

"Surely, colonel, that won't annoy so brave a soldier as yourself, will it?"

"Of course not," said Colonel Sylvester.

"I believe he is a coward," thought Captain Miller, but he said no more. When they reached the boat he led the prisoner below, where he left him securely guarded, to amuse himself until orders should be received concerning the ultimate fate of Colonel Sylvester. Captain Miller then sought Commodore Foote and had a long talk with him about his captive and the storming of Fort Donelson.

The next day was even colder and more depressing than its predecessor.

By three o'clock in the afternoon the six gunboat attacked the fort. They ran up to within four hundred yards of Don-

elson. A storm of heavy missiles poured down upon the boat containing Captain Miller and his prisoner. The Confederate guns, mounted at an elevation of thirty feet above them, had an easy vantage over the fleet. Miller's vessel was perforated with fifty-nine shots. For a long distance the iron hail, striking the metal armed vessel, could be heard. The fleet was greatly disabled, Commodore Foote, wounded but undaunted, was compelled to withdraw his fleet from the engagement after it had done most excellent work.

Miller's boat, commanded by —, had proceeded but a short way from the fort, when flames poured from the companion-way, and the greatest excitement prevailed, as it was not an iron-clad, and likely to burn as tinder almost.

Captain Miller plunged through the clouds of flame and smoke and rescued Colonel Sylvester from the smoke-filled cabin.

He bore him to the shore in a rowboat under cover of the rapidly descending night. Then he placed him in a deserted hut by the river bank closely guarded, and returned to the vessel with the remark that he would return again to the colonel in the morning and await further orders from General Grant.

The cold was intense, the temperature of the hut below zero, and Sylvester weak and unstrung by the excitement of the last two days was almost exhausted when Captain Miller returned in the morning.

"How is the prisoner?" he asked of the sentinel.

"Sleepin', sir," was the answer.

Captain Miller pushed open the door and entered the hut. In the growing light of dawn he saw Sylvester lying on a rude couch in the corner—a blanket was thrown over him—covering even his face.

Miller approached, drew down the blanket and started back in surprise, for there he saw not a man but Edith Sylvester—her hair falling in wavy masses over her shoulders. He called to her—but she neither moved nor stirred—he felt her forehead, it was cold.

"Help! Help!" he cried, then moaned—"my goodness, she is dead, and I have killed her!"

The sentry ran in. Captain Miller dispatched him for a surgeon.

The man hurried away.

Captain Miller placed his flask to Edith's lips to try and revive her.

Finally she moved, her eyes opened, and a bright flush dyed her cheeks.

"Forgive me," she murmured, "all's fair in war. I have saved my brother—you captured me the other night instead of him. He is in the fort. We were so alike, I knew I could do it. Forgive me, sweetheart, will you?"

"With all my heart!" cried her captor.

"Then I die happy, for I do love you," she whispered, smiling.

She closed her eyes. He called wildly upon her, but she neither moved nor answered.

He gave a great cry of pain as he realized that the woman he loved was freezing to death before his eyes.

He took off his overcoat and threw it over her. He chafed her hands wildly.

Finally the surgeon came.

She was borne back to her mother's house.

She did not die, but was quite well enough a month later to marry Captain Miller, for though the war was not over, still she had to acknowledge that his victory over her was as complete as Grant's at Fort Donelson. For he had won her in love and war, and having captured her truly, had exchanged the Miss Sylvester for Mrs. Miller—so you see it was all quite in keeping with the war code.

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